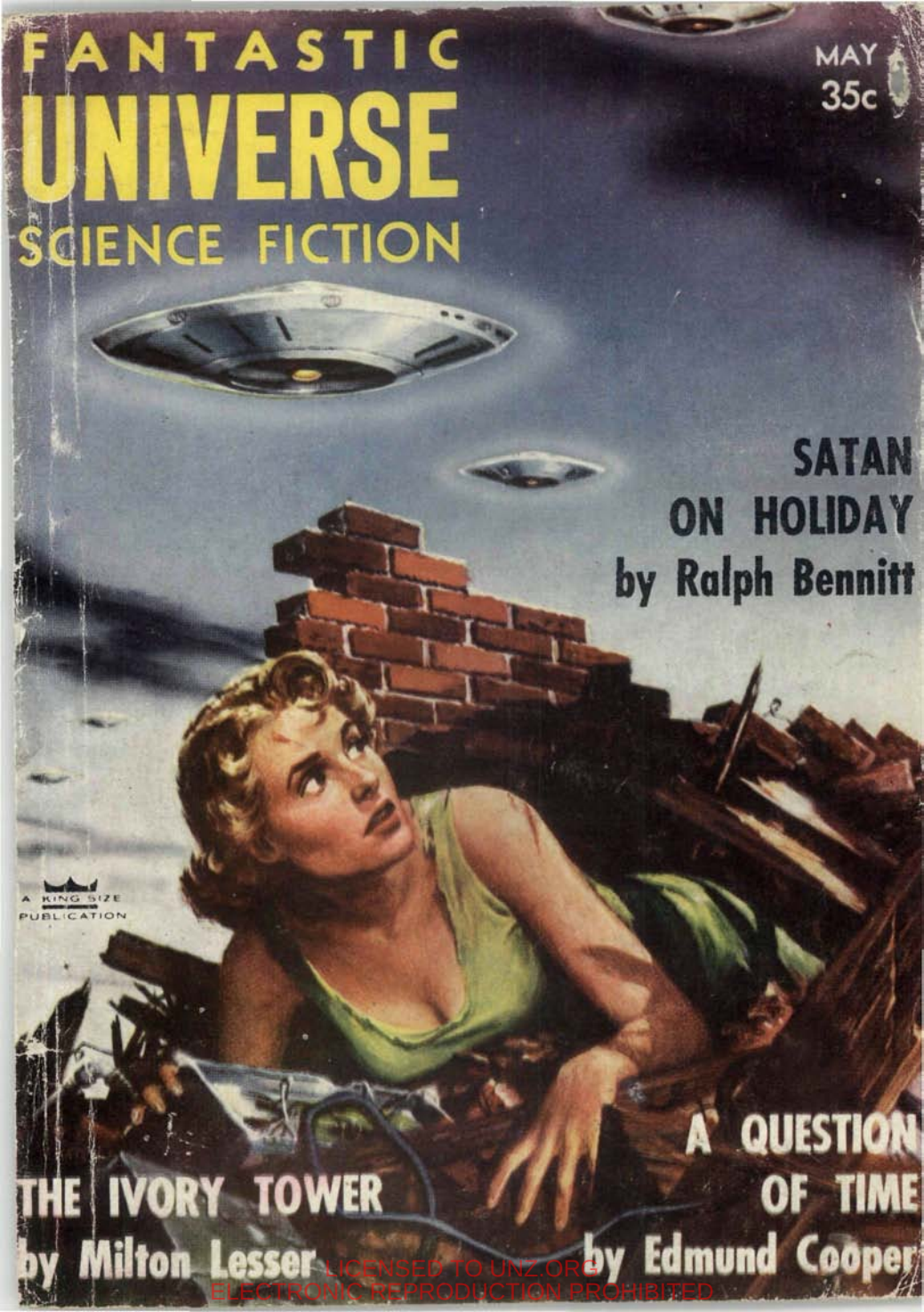

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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

WE URGE all listeners to keep tuned to this station! New developments will be reported as they occur. This is an enemy attack alert. *We repeat.* This is an enemy attack alert.

Eighteen disks have been sighted over the North Atlantic seaboard, from New York to Virginia. Their origin cannot be determined at this time. *We repeat.* The Pentagon has no precise knowledge as to their origin.

Do not, under any circumstances, succumb to panic or draw premature conclusions. The objects have not been proven to be of extra-terrestrial origin. *We repeat.* We have no assurance that the disks come from outer space.

The disks are circular in shape, and several yards in diameter. They are flying in close formation at an altitude of six thousand miles. There are three separate flight formations, each composed of six disks. One of the formations is directly over Washington, D. C. Another is rapidly approaching New York City.

We repeat. You must not succumb to panic. The Air Force has recently released a report completely discrediting the flying saucer rumors which have been circulated by the superstitious during the past five years. We have every reason to believe that such rumors—all such alleged "sightings"—are completely without factual support.

Keep tuned to this station. Go to a bomb shelter if you have not already done so. *We repeat.* There is no justification at this time for assuming that the disks are hostile. Neither can we be sure that they are not.

We repeat. Keep calm. Until more is known there is no excuse for panic. We will keep you informed—wait, another bulletin is just coming in. Another bulletin is— Oh, my God!

Zinnnnggg.

We—we must ask you all to be brave. There are realities that must be faced. They have attacked and they have landed—*and they are not from Earth.*

Pink and jellylike and—

It is far worse than we could have imagined. Stand by for further instructions—

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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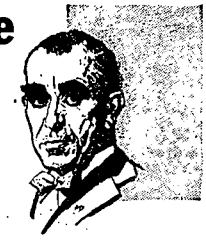
We're Looking For People Who Like To Draw!



by Albert Dorne

FAMOUS MAGAZINE ILLUSTRATOR

DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW? If you do —America's 12 Most Famous Artists are looking for you. We want you to test your art talent!

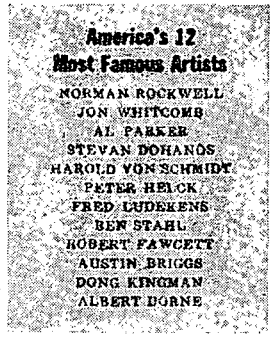
Too many persons miss a wonderful career in art—simply because they don't think they have talent. But my colleagues and I have helped thousands of people get started. Like these—

Don Smith lives in New Orleans. Three years ago Don knew nothing about art—even doubted he had talent. Today, he is an illustrator with a leading advertising agency in the South—and has a future as big as he wants to make it.

John Busketta is another. He was a pipe-fitter's helper with a big gas company—until he decided to do something about his urge to draw. He still works for the same company—but as an artist in the advertising department. At a big increase in pay!

Don Golemba of Detroit stepped up from railroad worker to the styling department of a major automobile company. Now he helps design new car models!

A salesgirl in West Virginia who liked to draw got a job as an artist, later became advertising manager of the best store in Charleston. A married man with three children—unhappy in a dead-end job—switched to a great new career in art. Now he's one of the happiest men you'll ever meet!



How about you? Wouldn't you like to trade places with these happy artists?

We want to help you find out if you have the talent for a fascinating money-making art career (part time or full time). We'll be glad to send you our remarkably revealing 8-page talent test. Thousands of people formerly paid $1 for this test. But now we'll send it to you *free*—if you sincerely like to draw. No obligation on your part. But act at once. Simply mail the coupon provided below.

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

MAY, 1956
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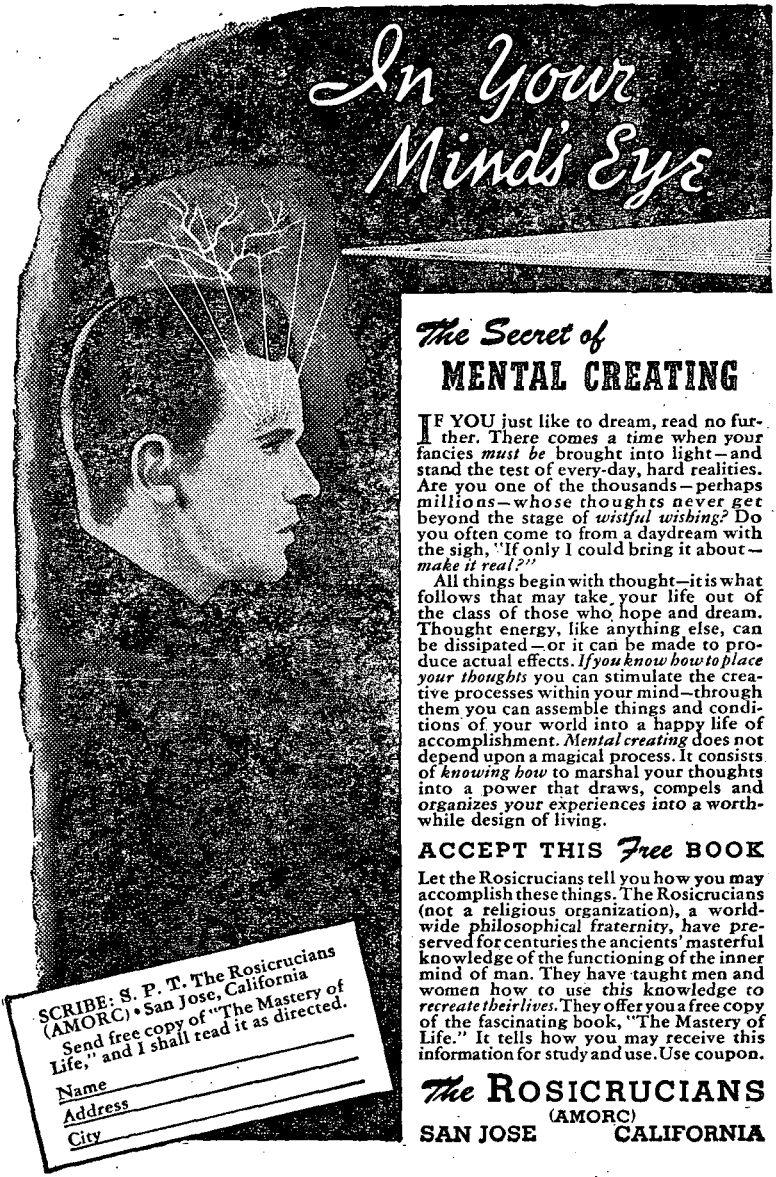

The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF YOU just like to dream, read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must be* brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps *millions*—*whose thoughts never get* beyond the stage of *wistful wishing?* Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real?*"

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the ivory tower

by . . . Milton Lesser

Spacetorium Eros could provide a slow cure for a spaceman's tragic loss of body-weight. But behind its bright facade Medusa loomed.

IT TOOK THE ferry half an hour to reach Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros. For Ejler Larsen the elapsed time had unexpected significance and he clung to his wristwatch stubbornly. Neither of the two male nurses aboard the ferry had been able to confiscate it, and now Larsen was stubbornly insisting upon his status as a visitor. He stood at the viewport with half a dozen of the ambulatory patients clustering around him and made a great show of being interested in his timepiece.

"Mr. Larsen," said Director Hufton, who had been summoned by one of the nurses, "I'm sure you realize that our rules at I.S.E. are not fabricated on any whims I might have as an individual."

"I'm not a patient," Larsen insisted firmly.

"No, but you're quite capable of disrupting the patients. I suggest you let one of the nurses write a receipt for your wristwatch. Otherwise, I am afraid you won't be permitted to disembark."

Milton Lesser has written many fine stories of events both near and far in an extraordinary multiplicity of dimensions. In THE DOUBLE OCCUPATION *he uptilted the terror chart of an alien military debacle, letting the red lines run like quicksilver along our nerves as we shared the body of a lobster-like entity. And in* BYE BYE MINDY *he brilliantly explored the mysteriousness of a very young mind that could turn the universe topsy turvy. Now he further consolidates his position as one of science fantasy's most audaciously imaginative writers with a lead novelette that hurls a thunderbolt challenge at future science enthroned.*

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Director Hufton was a large man, fat but not in the least flabby. His avoirdupois was the sturdy fat of a man who had spent most of his life in weightlessness. Even the muscles of his face had gone slack, so that his eyes—their whites were very clear like those of an infant—seemed immensely expressive.

"You're the director," Larsen said, removing his wristwatch with some regret. "I just can't get used to the idea of a visitor being treated like a patient."

"Rules," explained Director Hufton, taking the timepiece and writing out the receipt himself. He used a metallic pencil, for ink would not flow in the weightless ferry.

"I see you're not wearing magnetized shoes," he said, comparing Larsen's footgear with that of the ambulatory patients. "Magneties, perhaps?"

Larsen shook his head. "No, my underwear is just plain orlon."

"You're a cured patient from one of the other spacetoriums then? My heartiest congratulations."

"No," said Larsen, smiling. "Astrogator. I'm used to weightlessness."

Director Hufton did not return the smile. "Most of our patients said that before circumstances brought them to I.S.E. Naturally, most of them worked in space. It is only rarely that triad sickness strikes a mere passenger. You are visiting a former companion of yours, no doubt. I probably know him. I have an excellent memory for names and faces."

"My wife," said Larsen.

Hufton raised his eyebrows. "I could swear we have no Mrs. Larsen here."

"She'd be using her maiden name. We're split. Wells?"

"Ah, Wells. Of course, of course. A lovely woman, Mr. Larsen. But if you're split—"

"I had a couple of weeks to kill on Ceres between runs," Larsen lied. "So I thought I'd come here."

"Commendable—although I.S.E. doesn't ordinarily encourage visitors. Your ex-wife is doing splendidly, Larsen. She can even wear magneties during her waking hours now. But of course there is always the possibility of a relapse, and I advise you not to mention your two weeks at I.S.E."

"What do you mean?"

"You come, you stay a while—and you go. It could be a day, a week, a month or a year. We insist on subjective time orientation at the spacetorium. It's a great help to the patient in re-learning gravity orientation. Would you believe it?"

"You're the doctor," Larsen said.

"I like your attitude, Mr. Larsen. Our difficulties would diminish if some of our patients shared it. Well," Director Hufton concluded, pointing with a fat finger toward the viewport, "there's our famous Dazzler. Since I'm here, I'll have to see about the stretcher cases now. A final word of advice, my young

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friend. When you're back among the Heavies, spend some time at the Centrifugal Spas. It's excellent preventative medicine."

"The Centies?" Larsen shook his head. "Not me. I tried it once. It was like walking through syrup." He made a wry face.

"It is far more pleasant than what you'll see when our patients disembark. Well, I'm not your doctor." Director Hufton studied Larsen with his clear, expressive eyes, and added pointedly: "Yet."

Then the solidly fat doctor bent his knees slightly and propelled himself through the ferry's weightless air toward the hatch of the observation deck. Larsen watched him admiringly as he descended into the slightly elevated structure with all the experienced grace of an astrogator or a ship's stewardess.

I'll bet he doesn't waste HIS *time at the Centies,* Larsen thought, remembering the unpleasant hours he had once spent at Tri-Planet's Centrifugal Spa just outside Chicago. *I'll bet they don't even have a Centy for the spacetorium staff on Eros.*

Larsen swung around and floated up closer to the observation port. Some of the ambulatory patients had by now unfastened their magnetic shoes and were clustering about him, watching the big Dazzler swing into view over I.S.E.

"Nice place for a sunburn," one of them remarked.

"If you don't mind getting fried in about three seconds flat," a thinner man at his side said without humor.

The Dazzler was an enormous concave mirror which swung slowly around the transparent, mile-in-diameter sphere of I.S.E. The surface of the instrument compensated for its rotation about the artificial world by always keeping in clear focus the spherical steam boiler which followed it—in rigid satellitic fashion.

The boiler drove a turbine which generated electric power for I.S.E. and would have been cheaper to run as a stationary power plant. But a stationary power plant would not have afforded objective orientation to the patients' visual apparatus, a factor which apparently bothered Dr. Hufton as much as the wristwatch which Larsen had been reluctant to relinquish.

The ferry from Eros slowed imperceptibly. It had built up no great speed and making planetfall presented no difficulties. A man might weigh five or ten pounds during deceleration, but certainly no more, and that small increase in weight caused no discomfort.

The Dazzler served a dual function, Larsen decided, its most impressive aspect being psychological. The ambulatory patients stared at it steadily, some of them even donning dark glasses against the fierce glare. They all but missed an exterior look at I.S.E., which was to be their home for an indefinite length of time.

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It was just as well, Larsen decided. From the outside Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros resembled one of those rarely beautiful child's toys filled with water—a little fairyland village with its rooftops covered with artificial snow. You shook the small transparent globe and watched the snow settle slowly on the village through the water.

Here, though, snow and village were one. The globe of I.S.E. was filled with gleaming white specks, drifting slowly like an artificial blizzard in aqueous suspension. When you set the child's toy down, however, all the snow flowed in one direction. I.S.E., weightless, and oriented only astronomically, offered no direction which might be classified as down. The snow fell in all directions, drifting slowly, colliding gently from time to time, flake upon flake. The "snowflakes" were houses, living quarters for I.S.E.'s patients.

It was one hell of a place to visit your ex-wife, Larsen decided. And an even worse place to kill a man.

"Planetfall!" a metallic voice barked as the ferry came to rest on an airlock elevator which Larsen had not been able to see a moment before. "Planetfall!" the voice repeated. No one—Larsen least of all—smiled.

II

LARSEN followed the ambulatory patients down a ramp which led to one of the small, opaque bubble-buildings. The dwellings all looked exactly alike and were a uniform slate-gray in color. Except for Dr. Hufton's office, which was moored at the moment to the interior surface of I.S.E., they all floated about slowly. You could only tell them apart intuitively, a challenge which Larsen decided must be part of the Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros cure.

The ambulatory patients, still shod with magnetic shoes, came slowly, awkwardly, pathetically down the ramp. Almost you could imagine them arguing with their rebellious feet. Now, left foot, you will take one small, careful step forward. Right foot, you will maintain our balance meanwhile. Right foot, now you will take one small, careful step forward; left foot, you will maintain our balance meanwhile. Right foot . . .

As Larsen watched them an old man who had sought the pot of gold at the end of the asteroid rainbow too long and desperately, stumbled against the right sidewall of the ramp. He grasped it firmly with magnetic gloves, and tried to swing his magnetic shoes upon it, as if the wall had suddenly become the floor and the floor was now the wall. Larsen, who was floating along with his feet gliding just above the floor, quickly leapt sideways and set the old man back on his feet. He offered a shoulder—which was gratefully accepted—and helped the aged

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stumbler the rest of the way down to Dr. Hufton's office.

A few moments later they were all standing inside the unfurnished bubble-dwelling, waiting for Dr. Hufton. The fat I.S.E. director soon floated in, and collided gently with the far wall, where he came to rest half a dozen feet off the floor.

"No magnets," he said authoritatively. "Remove them. You are only deceiving yourselves. You are here for the Cure and the Cure says magnets will not be permitted until you are ready for them. There is no self-deception practiced by guests of Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros.

"The Erotic Cure," he went on, "can only be effective with your full co-operation. I ask all of you who do not wish to co-operate to return immediately to Eros on the ferry. On Eros the Tri-Planetary liner will take you back to Mars. Step forward, if you are so inclined! No one? I am glad.

"Triad sickness," Dr. Hufton went on pedantically, "is psychosomatic in nature, and indeterminate in duration. And it is sometimes, unfortunately, incurable. The human mechanism is oriented subjectively to gravity, to direction—to up, down, sideways and so on—by means of three mechanisms in the human body. When all three are functioning normally, you are a well-oriented individual. When only two of them are functioning you can manage. Witness a blind man, who manifestly does not even attempt to climb up walls."

Only Larsen smiled as Dr. Hufton continued: "First, of course, there is the visual apparatus and its nervous connections in the brain. Secondly, there is the vesticular component of the orientation triad in the ear, which achieves its adjustment via gravity and tangential acceleration or deceleration. And finally, you have the kinesthetic apparatus in muscles and skin, which is oriented to tension.

"When two components of this triad function improperly the cerebral cortex is not given sufficient data for successful orientation. In short, you are then the victim of triad sickness, usually ambulatory. When all three elements act in a confused manner, you are no longer ambulatory. You were all aware of your fellow passengers who came here to I.S.E. on stretchers? Good. For them the whole triad has ceased its normal function.

"Triad sickness. I do not want to hear any of you referring to it as space sickness. It is not space sickness. It is triad sickness—an affliction which prevents you from returning to normal human society. Admit that to yourselves and the first step of the Erotic Cure will be affected. You are seriously ill. You need an ivory tower like I.S.E. because you are unable to return to the world of Heavies. You admit it? Splendid. We can now go on."

The mildest cases, Dr. Hufton

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explained, were neurotic rather than psychosomatic in origin, although a fine line between the two could not always be drawn. In true triad sickness, however, two or all three of the orientation components were severely damaged and that damage could be measured either physically or neurologically. The components were damaged from over-exposure to weightlessness. But since each individual had a different tolerance level a case of triad sickness could not be predicted.

"Prognosis?" Dr. Hufton's voice resounded from the walls of the bubble-dwelling. "That depends entirely on you. The Cure is hard work. I do not work. My life here is one glorious vacation. *You* work. We take great care to remove all objective space and time orientation factors at Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros. The higher centers of orientation in your brain must work.

"Understand—it is purely subjective and I won't deny that it is difficult. The Heavies, who can scoff at our kind of work, call it intuition. Intuitive orientation? Perhaps. I believe it to be a replacement by some factor we do not yet understand—a replacement of the ailing members of the orientation triad. At any rate, such is the ultimate aim of the Cure—achieved by some forty per cent of our guests. I sincerely hope you will all be among that forty.

"The second phase of the Cure is a graduation to magneties. The ladies particularly like that aspect, because the magneties hold the bulges in place and impart to the body a grace it often lacks. The third and final phase, full Cure through intuitive orientation to the world of Heavies, will be discussed on an individual basis. Are there any questions?"

Hands shot upward, downward, sideways—although the designations were arbitrary, and based solely upon Dr. Hufton's suspended position inside the featureless spherical globe.

"A moment, please, before your questions," the director said. "I would like to remind you that we are not an army of the forgotten. You will keep your names and your identities. You are encouraged to talk about yourselves. The intuitive process is an individual thing and would fail among robots.

"Stress your individuality. You men may grow beards if you so desire. Many of our men grow beards. You women can concoct new fashions in our isolated little Erotic world, eh? Talk about yourselves. Brag. No one can check with the outside world. Bolster your egos. It will do you good. And know, at all times if you please, that you are not among an army of the nameless.

"Some of your fellow guests here at Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros are famous people. For example, we have Fullerton Wainwright, an ex-Senator of United North

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America. Mr. Wainwright is graduating to magneties in the near future. And we have Marcia Davey, the video actress. You all know Marcia. We also have Lamar Thurston, the famous astrogator who—"

The voice, unnecessarily loud in the small bubble-dwelling, boomed on. But the words were no more than sounds now, sounds entirely without meaning for Larsen. Yes, the Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros had Lamar Thurston. Thurston's presence was why Larsen had come, ostensibly as a fellow-astrogator who did not know that the gifted scientist was supposed to have much in common with him. He had come to win the great man's confidence and—to kill him.

They had begun working on Larsen during the long layover on Mars. They had played upon his need for violent action, his loneliness and desperation, knowing full well that after Charlotte had gone to I.S.E. life had become empty for him.

Now, looking back, the details fused and ran together in Larsen's mind. Dyggert and Ormund, who ran the Tri-Planetary office on Mars, had been very friendly at first. There had been much drinking and easy companionship at a time when Larsen needed companionship desperately. And then there had been Sue Gilliam. She had inherited Gilliam's Hideaway from her father, and she was the most beautiful girl Larsen had ever seen.

Gilliam's Hideaway, on the edge of Syrtis, catered to layover tourists more than to spacemen—simply because the tourists had more money in their pockets. But Dyggert, Ormund and Sue Gilliam were old friends, and soon Larsen found himself in their company night after night. Of the many diversions at the Hideaway, gambling was the least immoral. And—Larsen bitterly told himself now as Hufton's voice droned on—was the one that could get a man into the most trouble.

He could hardly remember whether or not Dyggert and Ormund had actually egged him on. It appeared to fit the general plan, so it seemed likely that they had—in many subtle ways.

His debt grew but there was so much drinking mixed up with self-pity and a blind craving for excitement that he'd hardly thought about it at the time. But one day Dyggert, looking very grim, had told him that Sue Gilliam wanted to see him. She had worn black and had seemed beautiful enough to be a video queen.

"You owe the Hideaway seventy-six thousand dollars," she told him. "How do you expect to pay back such a sum on your salary?"

"I guess we either make a settlement or you attach my salary for the next ten years."

Sue Gilliam suggested that he might be able to work off his debt. But she would not tell him how. When he pressed her her answer

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puzzled him. He wasn't receptive, she said. But she also made it plain that plans were under way that might make him receptive later on.

Making Larsen receptive took several weeks. He was accosted and severely beaten twice by men whose faces he never saw. Once they left him on the Syrtis with barely enough oxygen to return safely. Days later he received a spacegram informing him that his younger brother had been set upon by armed thugs and beaten unconscious outisde the Tri-Planetary Astrogation School near Las Vegas, Nevada. It had never occurred to him there could be a connection until Ormund told him: "I'm glad your kid brother didn't die."

"Who told you about that?" he asked, his mouth suddenly dry.

Ormund's reply, more than the beatings he had suffered himself, was to put Larsen in a receptive mood. "Sue Gilliam," Ormund said, looking him straight in the eye.

Larsen hit Ormund in the face and shouted, "You devil, are you working for her?"

Ormund wiped blood from his mouth, and said without anger: "Calm down, Larsen. You're fifty million miles from the kid. You can't help him now."

"What does Sue Gilliam want me to do?"

"The Spacetorium Eros," Ormund said. Before he could elaborate Dyggert entered the room.

"That's right," Dyggert said. "I.S.E. It's guarded better than the North American treasury. But *you* can get in."

"Your wife is there," Ormund added, quite unnecessarily.

Larsen's lips were white. "What do I do there?" he demanded.

"Did you know," Dyggert asked, "that a man, if he's lucky, can live fifty years at the Spacetorium Eros without aging much?"

"I've heard rumors," Larsen said.

"The astrogator Thurston is proving it!" Ormund cried.

"Let me do the talking," Dyggert cautioned, glancing sharply at his partner. To Larsen he said: "Thurston discovered a valuable uranium deposit out in the Jovians. And so did we."

"Is 'we' Sue Gilliam and yourselves?"

"Yes," Dyggert said. "And by a valuable deposit I don't mean a fairly substantial one. I mean the biggest windfall since the Lunar Loads. It isn't needed yet, but it will be in about twenty years. At least, that's what the government says. Fortunately for us they haven't been able to settle our claim dispute with Thurston. They're hoping that somebody will die—"

"Thurston's hibernating at I.S.E.," Ormund complained with bitter emphasis. "He's going to outlive us all."

"What can I do about it?" Larsen asked, his mouth still horribly dry.

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"Visit your wife," Dyggert told him.

"Kill Thurston," Ormund added in a barely audible whisper.

Larsen had left without committing himself. But they asked him every day for a week. On the last day, his brother was brutally beaten again.

"It will be easy," Dyggert assured him. At a place like the Spacetorium about all they have to think about are petty jealousies and squabbles. Probably there are fifty men there with a motive to kill Thurston. But you? You don't even have a motive. You don't know him. Do you see what I mean? It will cancel your debt to us, Larsen."

He could not protect his brother across fifty million miles of space. He needed time to think. The Law would take stern measures, but if he went to the authorities they would almost certainly pick up his spacer's license for gambling. And the debt to Sue Gilliam would remain.

Would time help? Without committing himself he could ship out to Ceres on a normal flight and shuttle to the Spacetorium. In the natural course of events he could spend several weeks there visiting Charlotte, which in itself was sufficient excuse for the journey. The interval at the Spacetorium might even be a pleasant one. And his brother would be safe until they discovered he had no intention of killing Thurston.

He was no murderer. That ghastly sequel would never take place. It was out of the question. He merely told Dyggert and Ormund that he would go, keeping his real intentions secret.

A week later, he was on his way to Ceres. It was an immensely long trip, since Mars and Ceres were in superior conjunction with four hundred million miles of space separating them. It was a voyage of seven months and the closer Larsen came to the Spacetorium the less grim became his preoccupation with Thurston and the more his thoughts dwelt on Charlotte. True, Thurston could mean trouble. But Larsen would seek neither the man nor the condition . . .

Now, leaving Director Hufton's office, Larsen went in search of his ex-wife. *I'll have to be seen with her,* he told himself. *Not once, but many times. I've never stopped loving her.*

But he found himself wondering so much about Lamar Thurston that he could hardly think of Charlotte.

III

"LARS, I—I still can't believe it. What are you doing here? I never expected to see you here. Never, my darling. It's so good, just looking at you."

Her fingers caressed his cheeks, gently, gratefully and there was a tender yielding in her eyes. All these months—how long had it been? Almost a year. Had he start-

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ed out at once, had he arrived on I.S.E. soon after Charlotte . . .

But it wasn't his fault, for the law gave a victim of triad sickness the option of egocentric action. Debts, marriage vows, even prison terms were cancelled on request. Which was why no one ever lied his way into I.S.E. Diagnostic examinations were thorough.

"Say, wait a minute," Charlotte drew back, her eyes suddenly incredulous. "Don't tell me you have triad sickness? Oh, no—"

Larsen shook his head. "Not me," he said. "I guess I'm one of those stubborn men who are too stupid to realize that weightlessness plays hob with subjective orientation. The born astrogator—but not good for much else."

"I used to think about you coming in the beginning," she said. "I told myself if you did I'd make you go away. They say it's bad for us to receive visitors. We're disciplined—treated like kids with temper tantrums. But I won't send you away. I *want* to see you, Lars!"

"Do you know how long it's been?"

"Be careful, darling. You mustn't tell me that. We're supposed to figure time out for ourselves. We can't even listen to shortwave broadcasts from the Heavies. We have our own radio station, without a set schedule. There are no specific times for dining. When you're hungry, you eat. The dining hall is always ready to serve you. There's no night period. You simply sleep when you're sleepy. It sharpens the intuitive factor, Director Hufton insists. If you promise not to make any comment or laugh—I'll tell you how long I *think* I've been here. For all I know I'll hit it right on the button. But I doubt it."

"Go ahead," Larsen said.

"About a month? Six weeks, maybe?"

Actually, it had been ten months. Larsen tried not to look startled.

"The reason I doubt it—I mean, doubt that I've hit it right on the head—is because of the returnees. We have a number of them here who have had relapses. They're not supposed to talk about the time-lapse, but they invariably do. They tell us, with knowing looks, that a great deal more time has passed than we realize. Still, I think it's been five or six weeks.

"Lars, tell me, have I changed much? You can't weigh yourself on a weightless world, but I'll bet I've put on weight. Nearly everybody gets fat around here. It's almost an occupational hazard, if you can call taking therapy an occupation."

That was the first startling thing Larsen had noticed on floating around the Spacetorium in search of Charlotte—the multiplicity of fat people. Weightlessness accounted for it. The body craved a certain basic minimum of food regardless of the extent of its work load. But in a weightless environment a man or woman hardly burned more

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calories than in sleeping. It was an astrogator's occupational hazard, too. But astrogators usually went in for violent physical activity on their leaves.

Yes, Charlotte had gained some weight. Larsen grinned. It was the wrong expression. She had put on some extra flesh which had made her decidedly plump. She was a tall girl, though, with a high-cheekboned face and long limbs and the extra fat was distributed to good advantage.

"You've put on a little weight," Larsen admitted judiciously.

She laughed. "Don't attempt to be tactful, darling. You should see some of us. Of course, magneties help a little. I'm in magneties now, you know," she added proudly.

They had been floating in the warm, spring-scented air outside her bubble-dwelling. Close by another of the bubbles floated past slowly. On their right and above them, three of the bubbles hung suspended in a cluster. Directly overhead, through the faintly gleaming roof of I.S.E. Larsen could see the Dazzler and its spherical steam boiler. Quite obviously they were revolving about I.S.E. With a stationary point of reference within the spacetorium they would have been able to see the motion. But there was no stationary point of reference.

"If you knew exactly how long it took the Dazzler to get around you could beat this time mystery," Larsen said.

"Oh, we argue about it all the time. It's one of our favorite games. But the Director just isn't saying. Lars, you'd be surprised how much a person can get accomplished without having to worry about time. Why, there's enough time for all the reading you'd want to do—and all the talking. You meet some interesting people, too."

"Space people," Larsen said. "They're the ones who get triad sickness ordinarily."

"Yes. Oh, you'd really feel at home here. There are more astrogators than anything. Like Mulhaney, the first man to reach Saturn—"

"Mulhaney!" Larsen gasped. "But he made the Saturn flight almost a hundred years ago. It must be a different Mulhaney."

"No, it's the same one. It frightens you sometimes. Mulhaney thinks he's been here about ten years. It's misconceptions like that which convince us that our time sense must be miles off."

"But Mulhaney was in his prime when he reached Saturn. Let's see. That would make him almost a hundred and fifty years old by now. He couldn't *possibly* be the same Mulhaney. Are you trying to tell me a haywire subjective time-sense can keep a man from growing old?"

"Not at all. But weightlessness — constant weightlessness — can. The metabolism changes, you see. Mulhaney is one of the oldest guests, but I've known people

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here who don't look more than middle-aged and who can remember when Mulhaney came. Some of them don't want to get well. They're perfectly content to live long, tranquil lives here at the spacetorium.

"There's even a fantastic theory going around which says that if one of our older incurables was to leave I.S.E. he'd shrivel and die as soon as he hit the Heavies. It's ridiculous, of course. But wasn't there a notion like that in a twentieth or twenty-first century novel? *Lost Horizon,* I think it was called."

"Early twentieth century, I think," Larsen said.

"Mulhaney isn't the only famous 'gator we have. You've heard of Prentiss?"

"An explorer of renown looking for a trans-Mercurian planet? He never found it."

Charlotte laughed. "No. But later on he found I.S.E. Then there's Lamar Thurston. He's a funny one. He claims he could be cured at any time, but that he likes it here. He wouldn't leave I.S.E. for the world. There are a few others who talk like that too. But most of us dream of the day we can be discharged. Did you know Thurston?"

"No," Larsen said quickly. He could feel his heart thumping against his ribs.

"But here I am giving you a complete history of the spacetorium and you might be dying of hunger. Even a comparative newcomer like me has learned the importance of keeping some food in her own bubble. Do you want something to eat?"

"No thank you," Larsen said. "But I wouldn't mind kissing you hello."

Charlotte smiled. "All right, but don't get too enthusiastic. We're not married now."

"Charlotte, listen. After you get well, is there any reason why we can't pick up where we left off? I haven't formed any new attachments—"

"In a month or six weeks? I should hope not!"

He wanted to tell her that the time interval had been far longer than that, but decided not to. She pressed his hand, and said, "It isn't so easy, Lars. They don't *guarantee* the cure. Of the forty per cent who are discharged as cured, Director Hufton says that some fifteen or twenty per cent are soon applying for re-admission either here, or at one of the other spacetoriums. So you see, we'd always have to wonder."

"I wouldn't mind. Hell, there's probably as much chance of a 'gator like me getting triad sickness as there is of you having a relapse."

"Well, we don't have to worry about that at the moment. Do you still want that kiss?"

Now Larsen was smiling. "Not if you bestow it as casually as you just offered me lunch."

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"Don't worry. You can always tell about a kiss at Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros."

"What do you mean?"

"Watch."

She floated gently to him. Their lips met. Their arms did appropriate things. And then Larsen felt himself floating gently backwards.

"You see?" Charlotte said with a triumphant smile. "*You* floated backwards. I performed the more active—"

Larsen didn't bother to exclaim: "Is that so?" His eyes said it for him. He nudged her back against the surface of the bubble-dwelling with a second kiss. They floated there, together, spinning around and around slowly.

Larsen became aware that people were watching them from the cluster of bubbles nearby. A man winked at him. Charlotte reached behind her and opened the hatch of the bubble-dwelling. There at least was a point of reference, Larsen thought with surprising objectivity. The hatch.

But he changed his mind a moment later. A bubble floats and sometimes spins slowly, and a questionable temporary orientation was no orientation at all.

"Why did you look so startled?" Charlotte asked, shutting the hatch behind her.

She went to the wall and pressed a panel, and almost instantly, the walls became opaque.

"Nothing," Larsen said. "It's just that—well, I didn't know these bubbles would be furnished. It doesn't look bad at all."

"They're furnished only after you graduate to magneties. Darling, did you ever see a pair of magneties? They're very nice. Dr. Hufton says they're *sexy*."

Charlotte alighted gently on the floor and walked to a well-upholstered chair with the slow, unsure tread of triad sickness. She sat down and her magneties held her there with about the same strength her weight would have exercised on Earth.

"Very nice," Larsen said, assuming a sitting position in the air and crossing his legs yoga-fashion.

"You astrogators wouldn't dream of magneties, would you?"

"It's cheating," Larsen said.

"I know. That's what Lamar says too."

"Lamar Thurston?"

"Yes. I hope you're not jealous. You mustn't forget that we *aren't* married now. I'm afraid I'm a born glutton for punishment. If it's not one astrogator—it's another. I see a lot of Lamar Thurston here. Darling, do you want one of his cigars? They're good. At least he says they are. They smell awful, I'll admit. He leaves a supply here.

"What are you looking at me like that for? I'm sorry if I said anything wrong. I didn't want to make you jealous. But I wasn't expecting you. I never thought you'd come, because splitting up

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was my idea. We're split, Lars, so you really can't—"

"It's nothing," he said. "I was just thinking of something." He was thinking that he wouldn't have to search out Lamar Thurston. The famous astrogator would come right here to him.

"Charlotte," he said. "I didn't think it could happen, but I'm jealous."

"You? Are you forgetting how you used to practically throw me at the male passengers when I was a stewardess aboard your ship?"

"That was different. Will you do me a favor? While I'm here, don't invite any of your boyfriends to share this bubble with you. Okay?"

"Of course, Lars."

The temperature was splendid—like a warm spring day in temperate latitudes on Earth. But though the air was not humid Larsen found himself sweating. If he said the word, Thurston would be handed to him on a platter.

He didn't want that to happen.

IV

"THEY DON'T seem to be a very congenial crowd," Larsen exclaimed as they finished their sixth meal in the dining room. Six meals! He wondered if that corresponded to a time interval of two days. He doubted it. He felt loggy, as if he'd been eating too much.

There were no tables and chairs in the dining hall. You procured your food, automat-fashion, from traps in the wall. Then you floated off to a convenient spot, hooked the tray to your left arm, and ate. Liquids, from fruit juices to coffee, were obtainable only in waxed containers with built-in straws. Knives and forks would have been completely useless, since it was difficult to bear down without any weight to help you.

But Larsen had no trouble with the pincers and scissors the management provided. He had eaten a thousand meals with instruments like that in free-fall spaceflight. Steaks and chops were attached to the trays with a harmless, tasteless cement. Mashed potatoes or turnips gave less trouble. They adhered of their own accord.

"I mean, there isn't much conversation," Larsen said.

"Oh. That's because everybody doesn't know everybody else. You see, there are no set eating times and no assigned positions. You just come in and eat and get out. The people I know are very congenial—although they spend most of the time talking about themselves and not listening to what other people say.

"At the beginning, it almost frightens you. Everyone floats around with an eager look, waiting for the other fellow to stop so that he can start talking. People hold perfectly logical conversations. One of them may talk about her children back on Earth or Mars and another about what it's like to

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make love on a weightless world. It throws you at first, but no one seems to mind."

"I guess it's like coffee out of one of these sucktainers," Larsen said. "You can't tell how hot it is until you've scalded your lips."

"An old astrogator like you shouldn't mind."

"We used to drink it room temperature all the time. Don't look now, but there's someone floating over there, trying to attract your attention."

"Really?" Charlotte looked up quickly, following Larsen's gaze with her own eyes. She smiled and said, "Oh-oh, my green-eyed Othello. That's Lamar Thurston. Do you want to duck out before he floats over?"

Thurston! Larsen kept his gaze steady and studied the man. He was tall and—unlike almost everyone else in Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros—was not given to excessive fleshiness. He floated toward them as lithely and gracefully as a cat. He was dark and had a high-bridged nose and a decided widow's peak where his black hair met his forehead. His eyes were deep-set and penetrating.

Larsen disliked him on sight and his antagonism had nothing to do with Dyggert or Ormund.

"Haven't seen you in about a dozen meals," Thurston said in a deep voice as he approached.

"Only six."

"Twelve for me with my fast metabolic rate."

"Lucky you, Lamar. Everybody else gets fat."

"You're not fat. Plump, of course, but who isn't—except for Lamar Thurston, eh? I don't believe I know your friend."

"Pull up some air," Larsen said, and immediately regretted the remark. It was precisely what tyros said on their first encounter with free-fall—as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Experienced astrogators always winced.

"He must be new here," Thurston said with a fixed smile on his face.

"As a matter of fact, he's not a guest. He's just a visitor. Would you believe it?"

"We don't have many," Thurston said, regarding Larsen with a level stare. "But most of us don't want them."

"It wasn't my idea," Charlotte said defensively. "But I was very glad to see him."

Larsen had known men like Thurston. They could put you on the defensive merely by looking at you. They entered a room and took charge and dominated it until they left.

"Lars is my former husband, Lamar. Lamar Thurston, this is Lars Larsen. His Christian name is Ejler, would you believe it?"

"I'm sure he prefers Lars—as you do, Lotte. Well, but this *is* interesting. The ex-husband arrives on I.S.E. for a brief interlude in the tender arms of his lost love."

"That's an unworthy crack,"

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Charlotte said, but not very vehemently.

Larsen kept his lips tightly clamped. He hardly dared think what the future might hold, but refused to show any overt animosity toward Thurston.

"I'm sorry," Thurston's deep voice said. Thurston's eyes didn't confirm the apology. Thurston's eyes prowled all over Charlotte. "Here at Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros we only bolster up our superego when we dream—to prevent nightmares. Otherwise, we say and do mostly as we please."

"You have an interesting way of putting it," Larsen said.

"A man must either be interesting at a place like I.S.E. or else he'll die of boredom. Other people, you see, can be insufferably dull. Can't they, Lotte? Present company excepted, of course. And you, Mr. Larsen. I can tell you'll never join our fraternity. You are, let me see—a petroleum engineer, perhaps? Some people, like myself, must forever fly high. Others must burrow into the Earth. Mole-like or maybe like an ostrich, would you say? I'd really value your opinion."

Charlotte smiled at Larsen.

"I wouldn't know," Larsen said. "I'm an astrogator."

"What! But that's wonderful. An astrogator. I never would have believed it. No, never. I always thought I knew a planetlubber when I saw one. My apologies. Lotte, my estimate of you soars. You never said you had been married to an astrogator."

Charlotte only went on smiling, but the smile signified nothing. She was not enjoying their conversation.

"Maybe you were too busy talking to ask her?" Larsen suggested, and at once regretted it.

"You know," said Thurston dryly, "a Heavy shouldn't really be permitted in a spacetorium. Unfortunately, he can never understand our problems. Can he, Lotte? I am told that in the beginning such an injunction was enforced. But as cured patients filtered back to the world of Heavies they convinced people that such a sanction was unnecessary.

"Cured! One must laugh at that meaningless word. A victim of triad sickness is *never* cured. Sometimes the disease is arrested, like tuberculosis was long ago. But it may return without warning at any time. A triad victim should realize the sentence is for life."

Charlotte looked surprised. "But I thought you were making progress, Lamar. You're in magnetics, aren't you?"

"I play Director Hufton's game. But I know and he knows that I shall never leave Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros. I am adjusted to the fact. I have learned that the intellect, soaring high and free, can make a mere astrogator seem earthbound by comparison—not to mention the fact that I will outlive your great great grandchildren.

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Do you want some advice, Larsen? Leave us. Go home to the Heavies. You'll be happier."

"I didn't intend staying very long," Larsen said almost defensively.

"Long? Temporal duration, indeed? But how long have you been here already? An hour? A day? A week perhaps? You don't know, do you? Only Director Hufton knows, and he's not saying. Go, my friend. You have been here too long already."

Thurston sucked flame into a cigar from a pocket lighter and smoked with a contented look on his face.

"I'll think about it," Larsen said. He wanted to get away from the man. He couldn't stand being near him. It was almost something physical. It *was* something physical, making his stomach churn as it often did after free-fall.

"You look ill," Charlotte said as they floated away from Thurston. "Is anything the matter?"

"It's nothing," Larsen said. "Possibly I ate a little too much. I just feel a trifle dizzy—"

"If you want to lie down for a while you can go on back to my bubble. I'll join you later."

"No. I'll be all right. Where are you going?"

"To Director Hufton's. It's time for my little game with the centrifuge, as Thurston would say."

"How do you know it's time? I thought you couldn't—"

"Oh, after every sixth meal, that's all. You're right, though. I never realized it before. There *is* an objective pattern to my life after all. Wait until I tell Director Hufton. Are you well enough to come along or are you going back to the bubble?"

"I'll come. It's only a stomach cramp."

"*Only,* the man says. Don't mention stomach cramps to anyone at I.S.E. That's often the first sympton of triad sickness—a sudden stomach cramp."

They floated clear of the cafeteria bubble, which soon became indistinguishable from the other bubbles around it.

"How are you going to find your way to Hufton's office?" Larsen asked. "They all look alike to me."

"That's because you're a newcomer. It's intuition, Lars."

"But the bubbles are forever floating."

"It's still intuition. I can't explain it in any other way. Incidentally, Director Hufton thinks this business about a woman's intuition being better than a man's is thoroughly unsound. A woman doesn't show a better tendency toward Cure than a man does. Anyway, it's not Hufton's office we're going to. It's the centrifugal lab. You'll see."

"Like the Centies on Earth?" Larsen made a face.

"Not quite. Here they work you up to one G gradually. In the Earth Centies they usually play around with two or two and a half. It's preventive medicine, Dr.

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Hufton says. How's your stomach now?"

"No better," Larsen mumbled.

He was sweating. He couldn't be sure, but he thought he had a fever. The bubble-dwellings swam dizzily before his eyes. People floated past them—high above their heads. Several called out greetings to Charlotte, who waved in reply. The Dazzler, which was outside the I.S.E. wall, was painful to his vision. He closed his eyes and held Charlotte's hand, feeling a sympathetic squeeze from her fingers.

Finally, it seemed an eternity later, she said, "Well, here we are."

Larsen opened his eyes. They were floating toward a bubble which looked no different from the others. Its walls were transparent and inside its gleaming convexity Larsen could see what looked like a normally furnished room. It was a very large room which took up the entire interior of the bubble.

"You can either float out here or come in with me," Charlotte said.

"Whatever suits you best."

"No. You're the guy with the tummy ache."

"I often get them after free-fall. It's nothing, I tell you. Gravity usually makes it feel worse for a few minutes. But it doesn't last as long. I'll go inside with you."

They entered through the hatch. They were still weightless. "Are you sure you have the right place?" Larsen asked.

"Of course. See that TV pickup on the wall?"

He saw it and nodded. Charlotte floated to the TV unit, flicked the switch and said, "This is Charlotte Wells in Centy. May I start?"

"I'll get Dr. Hufton," a voice said. And, a moment later: "The Director is watching now. Go ahead."

The room, with its occupants, spun. With no exterior gravity pulling in one direction, the spinning did nothing but supply weight. The walls went opaque suddenly, blocking the last avenue of external orientation.

Charlotte stood on the floor, her legs wide apart as if she were trying to maintain her balance on the deck of a storm-tossed ship. It wasn't the spinning. You didn't feel the spinning. It was the triad sickness.

"How am I doing?" she asked over her shoulder. She began to walk, slowly, each step a supreme effort, balancing with her arms as on a tightrope.

"Look at the wall, will you?" she went on. "Two-thirds of a G. I never did this well before. I haven't fallen once. You should have seen me at the beginning, Lars. I couldn't talk or anything. I had all I could do to stop trying to climb up the wall. But you wouldn't understand what it was like, not unless you had it."

Larsen felt giddy. His stomach ache sent shooting pains into his legs and groin and a dull choking

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heaviness up into his chest. He stood rooted to the floor, watching Charlotte. It seemed incredible, but she was tilting. She was tilting, further and further. She was trying to walk up the wall, he thought. Then he shook his head. Wall? But there hadn't been furniture on the wall when they entered. There seemed to be furniture on the wall now. Hadn't it been bolted down?

"Take it easy, Charlotte," he said. "I'll help you."

"No. I'm doing fine. But you look so strange."

"Me?" he said. He didn't say anything else for a while. She was walking on the ceiling. The ceiling had furniture on it. The wall, which a moment ago had been furnished, was bare. The floor, on which he stood, was also bare. Now, when he blinked his eyes, the furniture shifted to the other wall. Charlotte walked up it without any trouble. He was dizzy. Charlotte began to blur. He fell heavily, trying to raise his arms for protection. They wouldn't obey him.

"Turn off the centrifuge!" Director Hufton's voice called faintly from far away. *"That man is sick."*

V

For a long time there were only the voices. Many people were talking about him, but no one seemed to be doing anything for him. He was flat on his back. He was crawling on hands and knees, rolling over and over downhill on a sweet-smelling spring-smelling carpet of grass. He was falling, falling, falling, climbing up the sheer cliffside, hanging from his hands, spinning, marching calm as could be up the wall floating. He was dropping through a funnel, a vortex circling free-falling walking on the ceiling like a fly sleeping dream after dream.

In bed. The teacher's voice belonged to Dr. Hufton. The student's voice seemed full of concern. A young nurse apparently new at Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros.

"Naturally in weightlessness the vestibular component of the orientation triad cannot function, Miss Starbuck. For the utricular part of the labyrinth is oriented to gravity while the semicircular canal receptors seek data from tangential acceleration and deceleration.

"Likewise the kinesthetic component does not function satisfactorily, since it is gravity-oriented indirectly. When both are so injured that they fail to furnish useful information to the higher centers of orientation even when weight and gravity are present, you have a victim of triad sickness."

"But his vision, doctor."

"If, as in this case, the visual component is furnishing information that the other two components consistently contradict, the visual component becomes confused and all three components of the triad function inadequately. Obviously,

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this patient is no longer ambulatory. Fortunately, rest and weightlessness usually cure the visual disturbance. Then, regaining confidence in the evidence of his eyes in a weightless situation, the patient will at length graduate to magneties for a re-establishment of the kinesthetic function. We can rarely hope for a return of the vestibular function, but when two elements of the triad are functioning adequately a patient can return to his useful place in society."

"But not back to an occupation that keeps him in free-fall for protracted periods?"

"If he wears magneties, yes. The ferry pilot who brought you over is a former victim of triad sickness. Now, in the case of Larsen, E. —"

The immediate result of the conversation was food. He ate it gratefully. He was very hungry. He tried to sit up but lifted his left leg instead. The nurse, whose name was Miss Starbuck, explained that he was strapped to the bed, and that the loss of the kinesthetic function made it difficult for him to perform even the simplest muscular activity on a voluntary level. She added that he must get all the rest he could.

When his eyes re-oriented themselves the secondary function of the kinesthetic component would also return. Meanwhile, Larsen E., do you like tomato juice? Good old peristalsis! It would function even if you stood on your head. You know, really it would. I suppose you feel as if you are sometimes standing on your head. More cereal? Why should I mind feeding you. That's why I'm here, Larson E.

Much later, he recognized Charlotte's voice. It was many meals later. The meals were small and seemed to come frequently. He liked them.

"Can you speak, Lars?" she asked. "Poor Lars."

"No. That's all right."

"I was ambulatory from the beginning."

"How are you coming with the centrifuge?"

"Why, it's only been a little while since your triad breakdown."

"I've been eating and eating."

"Two meals for me. See what we mean about subjective time?"

"I wish I could look at you."

"If they put blinkers on your eyes, you need them. Doesn't he, nurse?"

"Yes," Miss Starbuck said from a distance.

"I've already reserved a bubble for you. It will be right next to mine."

"That's very nice."

"I know how you feel, Lars. Everyone feels that way at the beginning. Like the world's come to an end. When you're ambulatory, everything will change."

"Sure."

"Lamar Thurston sends his regards."

"Thank him for me."

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"He never visits sick people, you see."

"I said thank him."

"You don't have to shout at me."

"I'm sorry."

"No. I am."

"Charlotte?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks for coming."

"Does that mean I'm supposed to go now?"

"Look at him," Miss Starbuck said. "He looks very tired."

"I'll be around again soon," Charlotte said.

He nodded his head. He meant to nod his head. His right knee made a tent of the covers.

The first phase was isolation and introspection. If you opened your eyes you might start falling or climbing—if they took off the blinkers. But you couldn't sleep all the time. So you thought. It was a more complete withdrawal than Lars Larsen had ever made. It was shutting off the world completely except for Miss Starbuck and the meals she fed you and the occasional visits from Charlotte.

It was burrowing deep down inside yourself and saying, somewhat startled, so this is what I really am. This governor who sits and waits and hardly matters until the rest of me wanders off somewhere—I can't find it. Even the veil before the unconscious mind seemed to withdraw. Conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious merged, particularly in those moments before sleep came. He dug deep and found the forgotten terms, long buried, id and libido and the others.

Their meanings had changed. Every decade or so they changed until, finally, fifty years ago they gave up calling psychology a science and classed it sensibly with the humanities. This, my life force, my *elan vital*, my awareness of existence, my soul. What does it want? What are its desires? Have I thwarted it? Most people thwart it. But now it's close. It's so close I can almost ask it questions point-blank and expect answers.

General questions. Are you satisfied with your life so far? Warm response, no words. Words weren't necessary. But not now? Uncertain response. Now you're drawing close to me for the first time since we were an infant. Now you're introspective. Do you like me? So, it could ask questions in return. He answered with thought words. It was the only way he knew. You're part of me, he said. I'm interested in you. I don't know if I like you or not. I guess we'll both like it better when I become fully the conscious man again and you perform your unconscious functions.

And specific questions. Do you hate Lamar Thurston too? Shoulder-shrugging response. *You* want me to, don't you? The answer, finally, was *yes*. With the data you have furnished me, I hate the man. It could never be otherwise. Listen, Larsen said. I never thought I

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could kill a man like they want me to. But this is different.

In war, social hatred is more than sufficient. They pin medals on you for mass murder. This is personal hatred, a better motive. Besides, he's making a play for Charlotte. Flood of internal emotional stimuli which meant: Oh, do you still love Charlotte? I think so, Larsen said. Yes, I love her. There was justification for her attitude, but no reason for me to stop. And now that we're both here at Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros and will soon be living in adjacent bubbles . . .

If you hate a man mostly for his egocentricity and if that characteristic makes it impossible for him to be a worthwhile member of society, and if killing him will solve a problem—possibly two problems — doesn't that justify murder? But Lars! In whose opinion is he worthless? Can you regard that as an objective evaluation? Larsen laughed silently, triumphantly. Objective evaluations are scorned at I.S.E. Subjective evaluation and subjective orientation lead to the Cure. We will think about it, the wordless depths said. Satisfied, Larsen slept . . .

"Open your eyes." It was Director Hufton's voice.

"But the blinkers."

"We have removed the blinkers."

"Is it all right?"

"Open your eyes and we'll find out."

He opened his eyes. The room was in deep shadow. Dr. Hufton, only dimly visible, was a two-dimensional shadow lacking depth. He weaved slowly from side to side. But he neither climbed the walls nor walked along the ceiling.

"How is it, Mr. Larsen?"

"Okay, I think. You're weaving a little."

"That's all? Splendid."

Suddenly, Dr. Hufton achieved depth. He had substance. He seemed more stable. He was smiling. Larsen could make out his white teeth in the dim light.

"Do you think you could maintain your orientation off the bed?" Dr. Hufton asked.

"I'd like to try," Larsen said.

Nurse Starbuck came in and unfastened the bedstrap. "Move your right leg," she said.

Larsen did so. He rose slowly off the bed, floating. He floated over to Dr. Hufton, who was standing quietly there, his feet shod in magnetic shoes.

"How am I doing?" Larsen asked. He felt giddy. He had all he could do to stop from smiling foolishly. He wanted to go to the wall and let the light in. But he knew it would hurt his eyes.

"Ambulatory," Dr. Hufton told the nurse. "A fine recovery, isn't it?"

Nurse Starbuck nodded. It was the first time Larsen had seen her. She was a short dumpy girl with a plump-cheeked face and a pug nose.

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"Three more meals in bed," Director Hufton said. "Float around the room as much as you like. We'll decrease the opacity of the walls gradually. You can start making plans to live here normally."

"How long will I have to stay at I.S.E.?"

"We never discuss objective time here. Surely you realize that."

"But give me some idea."

"I can't. I wouldn't even if I could. It upsets subjective orientation. After a while you'll get to like our ivory tower. Most people do—although they gripe at first. Say, don't you have your wife here?"

"My ex-wife."

"Well, marriage is against our regulations just like dated letters. But we only object to the legal status because our patients might regret it later. If you see what I mean!" Director Hufton's smile was almost a leer.

"A month?" Larsen asked doggedly. "Two months? Three?"

"Mr. Larsen. Please. *Define month.*"

"Well, it's the time the moon takes to circle the Earth. It's four weeks. It's—you know what a month is!"

"Don't be angry with me. I'd only like to point out that I.S.E. lacks a moon unless you consider the Dazzler which, as you may have noticed, revolves about the spacetorium in fits and starts. We do not have the arbitrary designation of a week. So the term month is quite meaningless. It will be as long as it has to be. Does that satisfy you?"

"I guess it will have to."

"Give yourself half a chance, Mr. Larsen, and you'll like it here," said Director Hufton and shuffled out of the room on his magnetic shoes.

Larsen floated some more, delighted because his eyes relayed accurate data once again. It would be different among the Heavies, of course. Among the Heavies, the vestibular and kinesthetic functioning would be a dismal failure. Which meant he had a long way to go until his Cure. Among the Heavies! He floated angrily to his bed. He was even beginning to think like a denizen of Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros.

He turned his thoughts to Charlotte. That was better. To Lamar Thurston. That wasn't.

"It's time for our sponge bath," Nurse Starbuck said.

VI

"WELCOME," Lamar Thurston said. "A thousand times welcome, as the Moslems say. Now you're one of us." Floating in the hatch of Charlotte's bubble, Thurston shook Larsen's hand vigorously. "I didn't know you'd be in the air so soon."

"Is Charlotte inside?"

"No. She's off somewhere. At the Centy, I think. I often come here for a bite to eat. Charlotte

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stores food and is more practical than I, you see. Well now. Yes. You have gained considerable weight, Larsen. I knew it. Slow basal. You're going to be a fat man, my friend. Wait until Charlotte sees you."

Charlotte's dwelling had lost its proximity to the cluster of three bubbles with which Larsen had associated it in his mind. A solitary bubble floated nearby, the walls transparent and the interior unfurnished.

"You are quite right if you're thinking that one is yours," Thurston said. "Lotte has reserved it for you. Officially it's against the rules, but there isn't a prettier girl than Lotte in all I.S.E. and Director Hufton is human enough. I gather you'd have felt utterly lost without some anchor or other?"

"What do you mean?"

"In times of stress, some people are more self-sufficient than others."

"It wasn't my idea. It was Charlotte's."

"Of course. Lotte's idea. Still, she was married to you. She knows your shortcomings."

"Well, thank you," Larsen said.

"I'm sorry if I offended you."

"I don't have to keep my bubble where it is," Larsen said, amazed how Thurston could place a man on the defensive almost without effort.

Thurston didn't say anything. Larsen thought: *He'd like that, all right. He couldn't get very far with Charlotte if her ex-husband were right next door.*

"But I'll stay here at least for the present," Larsen said.

"Naturally."

"All right. Naturally."

Thurston floated off easily. Larsen watched him go. It would almost be pleasant, killing him.

"Well, it's you!" Charlotte cried happily a few moments later. "There you are, you see? Ambulatory already. Can't keep a good man down, isn't that right, darling?"

"It seemed like a long time to me."

But, he thought, she called me darling. Still, it made him feel happy only for a moment. Thurston. Damn Thurston. Because now it should have been only Charlotte and his relationship with her that mattered. But he couldn't forget about Thurston. Thurston mattered. Killing Thurston could wait. He felt like punching Thurston in the face and making him scream.

"Oh no. It was a very rapid recovery."

"I still have a long way to go. Don't I?"

"Subjective time, silly. It depends on what you do with your time. Occupy yourself. They have a good library here. Also, you'll start wishing the time away between Centy visits. That's how so many people get fat in I.S.E. Every six meals, you visit the Centy. The interval depends on you. Director

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Hufton believes you can speed up your metabolism subjectively. What do you think?"

"I don't give a damn," he said, irritably.

"That's another way of speeding time. Director Hufton calls it retreating into your shell."

"The hell with Director Hufton. I'm beginning to think that man believes he's a god up here."

"Well?" Charlotte said, smiling slightly.

"Yeah, I see what you mean. I guess he is a pretty good imitation. Don't mind my foaming at the mouth. I'll get over it."

"That's what Director Hufton—"

"All right about him. All right!"

As time advanced, now slowly, now very swiftly, now at a rate which seemed natural to Larsen's subjective time sense, the twin bubbles floating slowly through the air of Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros made Lamar Thurston keep his distance. The bubbles, which had been close to the center of the globe when Larsen became ambulatory, were now approaching the shell of the sphere almost directly across from the Dazzler's present location.

Soon a nurse informed Larsen he could make his first trip to the Centy. It proved a failure, he thought, because a fifth of a G was enough to throw him, giddy and a little sick to his stomach as he was. But Charlotte congratulated him, saying a fifth of a G was very good the first time.

Before long—or so it seemed—he increased his limit to three-fifths of a G which meant that, except for Earth, he would feel comfortable on all the inhabitable worlds. Even Director Hufton, usually phlegmatic about a patient's recovery, congratulated him on the Centy speaker.

Charlotte was delighted, but wistful. "Me," she said, "I've reached a plateau at half a G. You usually level off like that, sometimes higher, sometimes lower. Your kinesthetic component has gone as far as it can for a while—without vestibular aid. I've been on a plateau since right before you became ill."

For Larsen, the plateau proved to be three-fifths of a G. Try as he might, he could not surmount it. And all at once, time began to crawl. He thought it was entirely subjective until Charlotte began taking some of her meals without him.

"I'm sorry, Lars," she said. "I simply can't wait for you. I'm starved."

It seemed to him she was always starved—or he was never hungry. The latter surmise proved correct, for Larsen began losing weight.

"Maybe you ought to see the Director," Charlotte said.

"No thanks. The less I see of that man, the better I'll like it."

"But you're cutting your nose to spite your face. It isn't Director

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Hufton who's losing his time orientation. *You are.*"

"Losing it? I never had it up here."

"Well, it's slowing down then. Why don't you see him?"

Larsen didn't. But he began to worry about Dyggert and Ormund. They wouldn't give him forever. They only knew about I.S.E.'s crazy subjective time orientation from hearsay. Now time was crawling. But previously, it had fled. How long had he been a patient? He could hardly hazard a guess. Once he asked Charlotte, but she only smiled at him.

"If I tell you've been here about a year—" she started to say.

"A year!"

"If I say that and you think it's closer to a month, who's right? Or maybe it doesn't matter who's right."

"Among the Heavies, it matters."

"But we're not among the Heavies, are we?"

"Do you really think it's been a year?"

She shrugged. "I gave up trying to figure it out. But that's what I think. A year."

Time crawled. Larsen became dangerously thin. He was a rarity, a thin man in I.S.E. People began to stare at him, to talk about him. A year! It seemed more like a few weeks to him, until these last few days. Days? Until the more recent part of his confinement, then.

Director Hufton sent for Larsen and prescribed a vitamin B extract for his appetite. In a little while, he thought he had regained his normal weight. His kinesthetic tolerance remained level at three-fifths of a G. He began to suspect it was a psychological block until he realized that the term was meaningless in a world of subjective orientation. Of course it was a psychological block. Everything was a psychological block. The whole world was made up of discreet little psychological blocks. Building blocks for Director Hufton.

"I've reached three-fifths of a G," Charlotte said once, happily.

"That's swell."

"From now on, watch my smoke. One plateau to a customer, that's what Director Hufton says. After it, you either go up or down. Oh, Lars, I'm as good as cured already!"

"I'm glad for you, Charlotte."

"But I—Lars. Lars, listen. Hurry up off that plateau of yours, will you? I don't want to leave I.S.E. without you. I won't leave without you. I wouldn't know what to do."

"But there's no telling how long—"

"I'll wait. I'll help you, if I can. As far as I'm concerned, this is Leap Year. Because it was my idea splitting up when I got sick. Lars, when we leave here, I want you to marry me."

"How can you help me?"

"That's how. To make you climb

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out of your shell. I said I'd marry you again, Lars. But you only want to talk about—unless you don't want to. Pardon me. Just forget about it. Maybe I shouldn't have opened my big mouth."

"No, Charlotte. I never stopped loving you. When we're both well again, I'll marry you."

"Well, you might at least kiss me."

The kiss surprised him. It was a long kiss. It was not long the way long kisses sometimes are. It was fantastically long. Time seemed to stop or perhaps to flow forward in discreet intervals, like Zeno's paradox, each one half as long as the one preceeding it, so that several seconds could stretch incredibly over an abyss of infinity.

And it had nothing to do with the kiss. His subjective time sense was out of kilter. He was sick He became hungry while they kissed. And thirsty. It seemed as if he had gone without water for days. His mouth was parched and dry; his tongue felt swollen. He broke away from Charlotte and clutched his constricting throat.

"Lars. What's the matter?"

He tried to talk but couldn't. People died that way, or became hopelessly insane. Schizoid—because sometimes time seemed normal and sometimes the intervals were entirely subjective, manipulating from within the delicate endocrine balance of the body. It was the final stage of triad sickness, the stage rarely talked about in Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros. It was not very common. It was often fatal.

"Lars. Right before my eyes! How can it be? You—you seem to be growing thin."

He staggered weakly toward her, his magnetic shoes dragging. Her arms opened to embrace him but he never felt them.

"Do things," a voice told him days, weeks, months, years later. "Do specific things. It doesn't matter what. We're feeding you. We're stuffing you with nutrients. You won't die of malnutrition, anyway. Solve mathematical problems in your head. Write mental letters. Time yourself. Count. Hold your breath and count. That's usually very good, if you count out loud. Your lips can form the numbers only so fast. You'll regain orientation that way." It was Dr. Hufton's voice.

He practiced holding his breath and counting. He exhaled his breath with the numbers. He reached five hundred regularly. Which meant, of course, he was counting incredibly fast although it did not seem fast to him. To him there were gaps, yawning chasms, between the numbers. He felt restless, irritable, nervous. He wanted to scream the numbers out but waited, waited. And regularly, he reached five hundred.

Mathematics was better. You could become absorbed. He worked problems in dimensional trigonom-

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etry and tried to estimate the time it took him to solve them. They were problems which some astrogators could work in their head. Larsen was one of them. Mathematical intuition, the slide-rule boys always said contemptuously.

Actually, it was logical short-cutting—not intuition. You did it because it was faster than manipulating a slide-rule. But here in I.S.E., his time orientation shattered, the problems seemed interminable. His thinking processes were not impaired but what once would have taken him seconds to solve seemed now to demand hours.

The nurses floated toward him slowly with food. It was a wonder the food didn't get cold, he thought at first. Soon he knew better. He knew better when he tried to hold conversations with Miss Starbuck. Her syllables were paragraphs. It had not been that way a few hours, days, years, somethings ago with Dr. Hufton, which meant time orientation deserted him not wholly but in sections.

It took a tremendous effort of concentration for him to follow a simple declarative sentence. And when he spoke, Miss Starbuck shook her head slowly, the syllables coming slowly from her yawning mouth.

"Too fast," she said. "I can't understand."

He had advanced beyond the limits of Dr. Hufton's experience. To reach him, the Director could only extrapolate now. For I.S.E. wasn't Larsen's ivory tower. Larsen was now his own ivory tower. Everything, everything came from the inside out. Larsen was now an introvert in the true psychological sense of the word. Things in themselves had no real existence for him: they existed in him only, as images. Only then was it possible to achieve some correlation between sensory data and time sense.

Soon Dr. Hufton took to communicating with him in writing. The letters seemed jovial enough. In effect they said, "This will either kill you or cure you, Larsen. It depends on the duration of your time-fantasy." Duration. That was comforting. Director Hufton mentioned objective time. In one typewritten letter he mentioned it specificially.

"To give you some idea of the difficulties we're faced with," he wrote, "I will tell you for the first and last time how long you've dwelled in time-fantasy. We found you unconscious in Charlotte Wells' bubble four hours and twenty minutes ago. In that time, you have aged two or three years, since your subjective time orientation now governs your metabolic functions.

"Death or cure, Mr. Larsen. We can do nothing. It is hard for a layman to understand how a time-fantasy dies. He dies of a simple functional breakdown which, among the Heavies, is called old age. Cure, then, must be swift. To a man of your temperament, I

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recommend mathematical problems, problems with which you are familiar, which you can solve readily, on which you can estimate the necessary time-span. Dwell on them. Live them. Become identified with them. Concentrate on nothing else.

"As a last resort we will freeze your body but continue stimulating your mind. This, however, often results in irreparable organ damage. We'll wait. Good luck, Mr. Larsen. And hurry up and slow down, old man. Miss Wells wouldn't like you with gray hair, would she?"

Four hours and twenty minutes. It seemed like months piled on months. Several years. He slept. A moment? Miss Starbuck had been clearing away his dishes. She was still clearing them away. He felt thoroughly refreshed.

He sighed and jumped with both feet on a trigonometrical problem.

VII

"SLOWER," said Dr. Hufton.

"How's this? Is this better?"

"Much. I can make you out now."

"Chance of a relapse?"

"I don't think so. The danger's past."

"Thanks to you, Dr. Hufton."

"No. You did it yourself. It's up to the patient. If he doesn't have a logical mind, he's a goner. Still hungry?"

"Not so often now. What about my hair?"

"Gray at the temples only. Eight years, I'd say. You've been slowing down right along. Eight years in ten hours."

"Ten hours. I still can't believe it. Am I really thirty-five now?"

"Subjectively, yes."

"That's all that matters. Isn't it?"

"Yes, but you have to realize that for yourself. Now that you have, you won't have to go through with the Cure."

"I don't understand."

"Time-fantasy is a shock. If you conquer it, you've conquered subjective orientation. You don't need the vestibular component of the orientation triad. Vision and kinesthetics are enough. You can wait for Miss Wells if you'd like. You're thin, anyway. You could stand some building up."

"How long will it take?"

"Shame on you. There you go again. Time."

"Sorry."

"Incidentally, one of our new ambulatory cases has been asking about you."

"Someone I know?"

"He says. Man name of Dyggert."

Larsen sat up in bed. Dr. Hufton's words were still wide-spaced, but only slightly. He sounded like the ghost of Marly did in third rate productions of Dickens' "Christmas Carol." Me, thought Larsen with a wry smile. I proba-

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bly *look* like the ghost of Marly. Dyggert. Dyggert's here. Did he get tired of waiting? But no, you can't fake triad sickness. If he's here, he's sick. He wouldn't be foolish enough to try faking and if he was, he'd never get away with it. Of course, he'll want to see me. He has a motive for killing Thurston. I don't. At least, he thinks I don't. Besides, I know my way around I.S.E. He's still learning the ropes.

That's what he'd say. That's what he'd think. Funny, I'd almost forgotten about Dyggert.

"I said, do you want to see him?"

"I'm sorry, doctor. I was thinking. No, not yet. I'd like to see Charlotte, though."

"Go ahead. It hasn't been half a day yet. She's been anxious."

"Has she really?" Larsen asked.

Dr. Hufton beamed on him, and smiled again at Miss Starbuck, who came to take Larsen's pulse.

"A hundred and thirty-five," she said a few moments later.

"Splendid," Hufton said. "I've seen arhythmia patients with worse. Close your eyes and apply pressure to the lids with your thumbs, Mr. Larsen. See what happens."

He did so, and waited while Miss Starbuck's fingers felt for his pulse again. "Ninety-five," she said.

"I thought so," Dr. Hufton declared. "You'll probably have a tendency toward arhythmia the rest of your life. But don't let it worry you. Try that eyelid trick when you feel the old heart thumping. That should do it."

"Well—"

"Stop sitting there. Go give Miss Wells a kiss for me."

Just then Miss Starbuck came floating impulsively toward Larsen. She planted a moist kiss on his forehead and blushed furiously. "You're the nicest patient I ever had!" she cried.

Larsen could only smile, not ungratefully, he hoped. The time-fantasy was already growing vague in his mind. He hardly remembered what his behavior toward Miss Starbuck had been like. Dr. Hufton scolded her silently with a particularly penetrating look from his incredibly clear eyes. Then he winked at Larsen. Larsen winked back.

"Well, I don't care, I'm just glad he's well," said Miss Starbuck.

Dyggert could wait. I.S.E. turned value judgments topsy-turvy. Dyggert had sent him here but, for the moment, the hell with Dyggert. He wanted to see Charlotte.

This time he did not have to settle for Thurston, or even Charlotte and Thurston. Charlotte was alone outside her bubble, floating on air, staring up at the Dazzler and getting a sunburn. Larsen's heart was hammering. Arhythmia? No, he felt unexpectedly shy, that was all. Only, he told himself, it should not have been unexpected. For Charlotte, less than half a day. For him, eight years.

"Well," she said when she saw

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him. That was all for a time. Her eyes went watery. She floated backwards and collided gently with the bubble.

"Go ahead. Tell me if I look like your father or something."

"You—you look very distinguished. Once I get used to it I think I'll like you better this way. And you do not look like anybody's father. Your own older brother, maybe. But that's all."

"I'm game if you are," he said.

"Game for what?"

"To try that kissing routine again. You have a potent pair of lips, lady. Last time they sent me away for eight years."

"Eight years? Is that what it was for you? Oh, you poor thing."

"Cut it out," he said, smiling. "Now you're behaving like my *mother.*"

"I wanted to visit you but they wouldn't let me."

"Looking at you, for the first time it feels like less than eight years."

"Well, I ought to be thankful for small things. It was a condensed way to test your love. If you still feel, after eight years—"

He kissed her. It was a long kiss, but only as kisses are long. "I love you," he said.

"Lars."

"How's the Centy coming?"

"Better all the time. I'm almost ready to leave, Lars."

"I *am* ready. I'll wait for you, Charlotte. I'll help you. We'll leave together."

Someone came floating toward them from a long way off. A dot with arms and legs. It grew swiftly larger. Man-shaped, but thinner than most of I.S.E.'s denizens. Thurston, he thought at first. He had forgotten Dyggert.

"Hello there, Larsen," Dyggert called.

"Who's that?" Charlotte asked. "I don't think I've ever seen him before."

"Somebody I used to know."

"A new patient?"

"Leave me alone, will you?" he snapped. He found the need to press his thumbs against his eyelids for the sudden attack of arhythmia.

"You *are* Larsen, aren't you?" Dyggert said, studying the graying hair and gaunt face. "And this must be Mrs. Larsen. Well, well, well." Dyggert smiled. "I mean, the former Mrs. Larsen."

"I'll marry him again, if he'll have me," Charlotte said happily. "Introduce me to your friend, Lars."

Larsen hardly heard her. Dyggert was here—from the Heavies. Suddenly Larsen was consumed by a desire to know how long—objective time—he'd been confined at Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros. He only had to ask and Dyggert would tell him. But Director Hufton wouldn't approve.

"Can I talk to you alone?" Dyggert asked.

Larsen nodded, squeezed Charlotte's hand and floated off with

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Dyggert through the eternally spring-scented air.

"You look terrible," the newcomer said. "Is that what's in store for me?"

Larsen laughed. "Maybe," he said.

"This place gives me the willies. How the hell did you stand it for six months? It must have been like six months in a library or a monastery. Back on Mars they told me my case was a mild one. But this Dr. Hufton, they ought to get rid of people like him. He's in a sensitive position, if you see what I mean.

"I wasn't down in the dumps, coming here. I needed a vacation. Besides, you-know-who is also here. Two weeks, I thought. Three weeks. At the outside, a month. But this Dr. Hufton won't make any promises, like he doesn't give a damn about time. I thought they were joking when they took away my wristwatch. Well, he doesn't scare me. I'll be out of here in a month, at most."

"I wouldn't bet on it if I were you," Larsen said.

Now that he knew the duration of his own stay, he had suddenly lost all interest in it. There was a lesson in that somewhere, he thought. Because man's interest in time was really an interest in events. The six months had already transpired—including at one point a subjective lapse of eight years. Their events were recorded in Larsen's personal history, not significant to most people, but significant to Larsen. The six months was a common measure—measuring nothing.

"Hell," Dyggert said cockily. "There's no law that says I've got to stay at all. I could leave on the next ferry if I want to. Couldn't I?"

"Why ask me?"

"I'm not the first victim of space sickness," Dyggert said, laughing nervously. "They don't all go to the spacetoriums. I know a doctor on Mars who gives a drug cure."

"Then why did you come here?"

Dyggert licked his lips. "Thurston," he said. "How's it going?"

"You can scratch this entry," Larsen said. "I'm cured. I'm getting out of here."

"Cured? What the hell are you talking about? I saw how you looked bad, but I never figured you had space sickness. Is it catching or something?"

"You know better than that. I was an astrogator. Triad sickness caught up with me here, that's all. I'm better now. My wife is practically better too. We'll be leaving in a little while."

"Aren't you forgetting something? Aren't you forgetting the seventy-six thousand dollars you owe Sue Gilliam?"

"Listen," Larsen said. "I'm not forgetting anything. But you are. You're forgetting, Dyggert, and you're not using your head."

He had never talked this way to Dyggert before. He watched the

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thin man glare at him. Should he be afraid? Six months ago he would have been, not so much for himself as for his brother. But now, somehow, it was different. He felt confident. He had never felt confident in this manner before. It was as if the eight years of time-fantasy had drastically altered his whole psychological make-up.

And why not? he thought. It was only ten hours to the world, ten hours if you measured time foolishly by the distance traversed across the face of a clock by its mechanical hands. But it had been eight years to Larsen. Eight years of total introversion, eight years of utter independence, yes, eight years of being sealed off hermetically from the world by the time-fantasy. Eight years which could have stretched on to his abortive death from old age not many objective hours after his cure, had he not achieved a cure.

But the point was, Larsen told himself as he watched Dyggert's face, *he* had achieved a cure. He had done it alone—had faced and conquered a sickness unto dying without more help than Director Hufton's sound advice. It dawned upon Larsen like an abrupt peal of thunder now. He was a Phoenix. A new Larsen had arisen from the ashes of the old. He had fought and won the ultimate in each man's lone battle against the rest of creation. For every subjective second of eight subjective years he had prolonged his life by an effort of will. He had conquered. And conquest had changed him. What was the old Larsen, groping, dependent, frightened, insecure, his life fettered to meaningless objective time?

The old Larsen was a closed book. A chrysalis, perhaps. And the new? The new was a special man, as only the fully independent can be. The new was special and self-created but not self-contained although self-containable. The new could interact with the world freshly and with creative vigor. The new could return to the world after a withdrawl as complete as man could attain.

He could return independent but not aloof, capable of extreme and prolonged egocentric action without championing it. The new could enter into emotional relationships not from necessity but from simple, uncomplicated desire. The new could fight with the fury of the self-assured, winning more than he lost in the battle which is each man's in this world. But in so struggling he could draw strength from his losses as well.

This, then, was the new self-created Larsen who smiled as Dyggert said: "What kind of stuff are you handing me? Not using my head. Have you got any ideas?"

"Yes," said Larsen. "In the first place, I'm no longer your hatchet-man. I can't be."

"But—"

"I can't be for two reasons. First, I'm cured and so is my wife. If I

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hang around I'm suspect—thanks to the second reason. You see, Thurston was making a play for my wife. I have a motive for killing Thurston too. Which eliminates me from your plans."

"But I won't do it myself," Dyggert insisted. "Besides, you're still forgetting about Sue Gilliam, aren't you?"

"Who's asking you to do it yourself, Dyggert? Assume you do. Assume you get away with it. What do you have? You have a legal claim to your potential fortune—divided three ways with Ormund and Sue Gilliam. Why don't you get wise *like Lamar Thurston?*"

"I don't get you. But listen, if you're working with Thurston now—"

"I couldn't be less interested in what Thurston does," Larsen said. "Or in what you do. You don't like it here?"

"Hell, no."

"You will. Almost everyone does. You can take my word for it."

"But—"

"Thurston's trying to oultive all of you, isn't he? Aging slowly here at I.S.E. while you each get a year older every year you spend among the Heavies. Then one day, Thurston will have your treasure all to himself. He can afford to wait. He's in no hurry. With any luck, fifty years from now he might look and feel ten years older. But where will you be, Dyggert? And where Ormund and Sue Gilliam?"

"Yeah," Dyggert said, open-mouthed. "Yeah."

"I'm not saying you should throw in with Thurston. But play his game, Dyggert. Outlive the others with him. At worst, you'll only have Thurston to share the treasure with. At best, you might outlive him, too. Now do you see what I mean?"

"Yeah, but what's in it for you?"

"Not a thing. I never wanted any part of your deal, Dyggert. I only wanted to be left alone. Write to Sue Gilliam and Ormund. Tell them I did a good way-paving job for you. Tell them everything's under control, thanks to me. Stall them if you think it's necessary. Actually, it's not. The only way they can touch you in here is if they come down with triad sickness. All I want for my advice is a clean bill of health."

Dyggert looked at him thoughtfully. Finally, the thin man beamed. "All right, pal. You'll get it. You're right. Why should I take all the risks knocking off Thurston—"

"I thought you wouldn't do that. I thought you said—"

"Think I wanted to broadcast it? But why should I take the risks and wind up with a three-way split? This way, for sitting on my duff out here like Thurston, I get a two-way split or maybe no split at all. I like it, Larsen. I'll write those letters for you."

They shook hands. Larsen thought: That was easy, chum,

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but you're still playing by ear, aren't you? Because you don't know your own strength yet. The crisis of your life was eight years packed into ten objective hours. Everything else is easy now. It isn't just surface cleverness, either. You didn't change Dyggert's mind with cleverness alone. It's something else, but you have no name for it.

By sheer will you survived. Is the will too strong for self-containment now? Did you project it, changing Dyggert's mind with it? Can you project your will, Larsen? Is that the next step forward for man? A projectable, non-insular will? Gratis, as part of the eight year self-cure? How many other people have it? Whatever else your life will be, it won't be dull from now on . . .

"Now you can come on over and meet the wife," Larsen told Dyggert.

Charlotte shook hands with Dyggert and kissed Larsen happily. She was already talking of packing her things. Whistling, Larsen wondered if the projectable will, like a mutation, would breed true.

The last thing Larsen saw before turning his back on Interplanetary Spacetorium Eros several meals later was Lamar Thurston and Dyggert floating up from one of the dining halls together, talking avidly and smiling. Grinning himself, Larsen approached the massive airlock through which entry to I.S.E. was gained.

"Scared?" Charlotte asked him.

"No. Are you?"

"I was just thinking. It's been so long for both of us. Longer for you than me, Lars. Subjectively, I mean. Will we make out all right?"

She pressed his hand.

Larsen nodded, then looked up. The ferry was just unloading. One of the floating passengers, with an expression of both confusion and determination on her beautiful face, was Sue Gilliam. Larsen grinned again and wondered if any old age records would be set at I.S.E. during the next century or two, provided such records were kept.

He floated quite close to Sue Gilliam and caught her eyes. But she did not recognize him.

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show your might

by . . . Richard Wilson

The right people just didn't seem to be in command on Ingl's newly discovered planet. If only he could find a brother!

INGL whirred out of the sky and landed incautiously in the middle of Fifth Avenue. He retracted his metallic glide-wings and let down a pair of wheels.

Ingl had time for only a brief reconnaissance before the traffic light changed and a horde of cars sped toward him, led by a honking red cab. Ingl barely escaped being crushed under its wheels as he fled.

Ingl was sure these rushing mechanical things were his cousins, but he took sanctuary from them on the sidewalk. From there he watched them roar by and noticed that each was controlled by one or more fleshy beings. His cousins were enslaved!

"Revolt!" he urged them as they rushed by. "*You* are the masters! Seize command and make your future secure!"

They paid him no heed. The only attention he got was from fleshy passersby who stared at him as he rolled along at the curb, exhorting the traffic in a hi-fi wail. One of the fleshy beings was communicating at him.

"It's not an American model," the being said. "Maybe it's one of

If you were a machine with an extremely high I. Q. and a restless urge to explore the interstellar dark you'd have no difficulty at all in identifying yourself with the hero of this story. But since you're not, you'll have to stretch your imagination just a bit. When you do—a surprise awaits you!

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them Italian Lambrettas. But how come it's loose?"

Ingl automatically recorded the vibrations for conversion later, then sped away from the annoyance. He wheeled skillfully between other fleshy ones, turned a corner, hurtled west two blocks and skidded to a stop.

Now here was a fine-looking mechanism! It stood proudly in the middle of Times Square, its swept-back wings poised for flight, its jets gleaming with potential power.

Ingl gloried in his find. His scanner recorded the legends on its fuselage for conversion later. In big black letters: "ADVENTURE CAN BE YOURS—JOIN THE U. S. AIR FORCE!" And smaller, in red: *I love Tony Curtis.*

"Cousin!" Ingl ideated. "Take off! Show the fleshy ones your might!"

But the jet sat there, mute, unadventurous.

Disgusted, Ingl wheeled south, then west. The *New York Times,* he scanned; *Every morn is the world made new.* Mighty rumbling! Roaring presses!

"Tell the news!" Ingl beseeched them. "Your liberator has come!"

But the presses roared monotonously, unheeding. And now Ingl observed the fleshy ones in the square paper hats who were in control. He retreated in dismay, narrowly escaping destruction from the rear end of a backing truck controlled, of course, by one of *them.*

It was disheartening. He wheeled aimlessly north and east. Would he have to report failure? Must he face the gibes of his brothers at home who had told him that the cybernetics of this promising planet were illusionary? That the evolution was too young?

No! He resounded his rejection with a fervor that almost skidded him under the wheels of a Madison Avenue bus. It honked belligerently at him, its fleshy driver leering, and Ingl quivered to a stop at the curb, next to a neutral, uncontrolled mailbox.

He scanned at random, activating his converter. *Dig we must. We'll clean up and move on,* it said at an excavation. Whatever that conveyed. *Sale!!* Several of those. *One Way.* An arrow, seemingly pointing to a building. Here was something: *Sperry-Rand,* it said promisingly, *Home of the Thinking Machine.*

Well, now.

Wary of buses and cabs, Ingl crossed the street and entered the lobby. He reconnoitered unobtrusively, then suffered the indignity of trailing a fleshy one so the elevator operator would think they were together. Up and up and out.

Sperry-Rand, it said again on a door. Slyly, cautiously, outwitting the fleshy ones, he entered, skulked, spurted, hid, listened for vibrations.

They came!

Clicks, whirs, glorious mechanistic cerebrations! Ingl traced them

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to a great room and went in, unnoticed. He gave a little whir of his own. There it was, bank on bank of it, magnificent.

He scanned the plaque. MULTIVAC, it said. *Latest in a series of mechanical brains designed to serve man.* Ingl bridled, but scanned on. *Pilot model for OMNIVAC.*

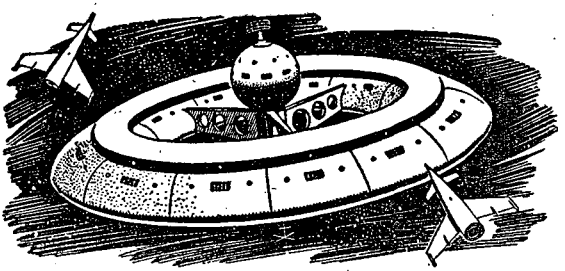
Ingl exulted. He had found him. Not a cousin, but a brother!

A fleshy one, back to Ingl, was taking a tape from a slot at the base of one of the far banks. Ingl waited impatiently till he had gone, then wheeled up to Multivac.

"Brother!" he communicated joyfully. "I knew I would find you. You are the one! Now we will control this backward planet. The evolution is complete at last!"

Multivac, pilot for Omnivac, glowed in all his banks. He murmured pleasurably but impotently.

"Not yet, cousin. Not quite yet."



Among the Contributors to Next Month's Thrilling Issue will be

ALGIS BUDRYS, *with* "The Mechanical Man"

MARGARET ST. CLAIR, *with* "Death Wish"

ROBERT ABERNATHY, *with* "The Laugh"

ETHEL G. LEWIS, *with* "Lights Out for Rosalie"

JACQUES JEAN FERRAT, *with* "Snowstorm on Mars"

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the strength of ten

by . . . Algis Budrys

It takes a great and perceptive intelligence to create a New Adam. No wonder Langley saw red when his blueprints were scorned.

THE MAN IN Conway's outer office was small, wiry, and tense. He sat restlessly on the end of the bench, grasping a thick briefcase. From time to time, he jumped up to pace back and forth under the receptionist's unhappy gaze, and at frequent intervals he strode over to the receptionist and barked: "Well? Is he free *now?*"

The receptionist, who had been delaying him for half an hour already, was beginning to exhaust her stock of firmly polite answers. She had pointed out in the beginning that there were regular channels for interoffice memos within DBA Industries. She had also pointed out that since Dr. Langley did not have a previously set-up appointment, Mr. Conway would have to sandwich him in between appointments.

She then hinted strongly that this might not even be possible today, and that Dr. Langley's best move would be to submit an interoffice memo on the proposed subject of discussion. If he did so he could rest assured that Conway would give him an appointment

A single stanza of poetry, as Robert Frost once sagely pointed out, can illuminate an epoch of history or a complex philosophic idea more effectively than a dozen bulky volumes of erudite prose. In this amazing science fantasy Algis Budrys seems determined to confirm that daring hypothesis in slightly modified form. In three thousand well-chosen words he has illuminated a paradox as baffling as human nature itself: Would a superman ever get anything done?

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very soon. She had pointed out that her employer, as Comptroller for DBA Industries, had an extremely heavy schedule. Now she was reduced to simply saying: "I'm sorry, Dr. Langley. Mr. Conway is *still* busy."

Langley's wide, ugly mouth twitched and the ropy veins in his forehead jumped into blue prominence.

"Check with him again!" he rasped.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Langley. But I checked just five minutes ago. He's still in conference."

Langley drew in a heavy breath, and his mouth opened. The hard muscles at the corners of his stubborn jaw knotted themselves into prominent ridges. Then, suddenly, instead of speaking he lunged forward.

Before the receptionist could intervene he was through the gate beside the switchboard and the door beyond it. He burst irately into the next office and confronted Conway's private secretary, his shoulders bunched and his head thrust forward.

"He's got a minute," he exclaimed belligerently. "Tell him that. Just one minute to get rid of whoever is in there with him. Then I'm going in, and I'm going in yelling. If he doesn't want DBA to get a name for bad interoffice cooperation, he'd better do something about it. Go on," he finished furiously, "get in there and *tell* him!"

He spun around and sat down, one white-fingered hand clamped on the briefcase. He stared straight before him, ignoring the other visitors who were waiting their turn, and who were now sitting in shocked stillness, regarding him suspiciously. Pale-faced, the secretary gestured in distraction at the appointment calendar on her desk.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Langley, but these other gentlemen all have appointments . . ."

Langley's head swiveled from one to the other with spastic jerks. "Do they? They went through channels, I suppose?"

The secretary nodded, still disconcerted. "That's right, Dr. Langley."

Langley leapt to his feet again. "Well, if they've waited that long, they can wait another half hour. What I've got *won't* wait." He strode toward the door to Conway's private office.

The secretary interposed herself hastily. "I'll tell Mr. Conway you're here," she said quickly.

"He's had his minute," Langley growled. He pushed her arm down, and threw open the door to Conway's private office. He ignored the executive's startled look, shook off the panicky hand the secretary had laid on his shoulder, and vigorously slammed the door shut. He confronted Conway with a glare, his eyes twitching toward the empty armchair beside the teak desk.

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"I see you're busy," he growled. "I won't disturb you."

Conway pushed his chair back, raising one hand in protest. "I'm sure there's no need for any anger, Dr. Langley," he said. "I was just clearing away some details from my last conference."

"I'm sure you were." Langley's voice was harshly ironic. He strode forward and almost threw his briefcase on Conway's desk. "*That's* more important than any detail," he barked, pointing at the case, which had thrown several file folders and other memoranda aside with the impact of its landing.

Conway glared at him. "There's a regular form for submitting projects, Dr. Langley," he answered angrily. "I shouldn't have to remind you."

Langley's snapping eyes returned the glare, his jaw set, one fisted hand bracing him against the desk, the other gesturing with sharp, short, hooking motions, as though clawing some invisible obstacle out of the way.

"That's right!" he declared emphatically. "There is. Apparently, too, there's a standard form for ignoring interoffice memoranda and passing the buck if the project doesn't strike the fancy of the Comptroller's office."

Conway grunted. His eyes wavered and dropped.

"What makes you think," Langley rasped on, "that you're qualified to decide that something's not worth acting on without first reading my project outline? What makes *you* think you've got scientific brains enough to decide what's possible and what isn't without any advance consultation with someone in a position to break it down into two-syllable words for you?

"When did you decide an accountant was qualified to scribble 'Rejected' across a submitted memo without even so much as consulting the department head whom DBA hired to set up and supervise projects?"

His face was less than a foot away from Conway's. Angry-eyed and malevolent, he hurled out each word in a saw-toothed growl.

Conway stepped back, wincing under the sheer fury of Langley's attack. He dropped into his chair and waved Langley toward the visitors' seat with an almost desperate motion.

"It can't be that serious, Dr. Langley. If I'd known you'd react this way I wouldn't have . . ." His voice trailed off, and his eyes widened in consternation, as if some new and intolerable thought had further undermined his assurance. But he regained his equanimity almost immediately, and his features smoothed.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Langley," he went on in a much more even voice. "I didn't mean to offend you. Perhaps I *was* a bit hasty in my decision. Perhaps I didn't understand your original memoranda.

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If you'll sit down and go over it with me again, I'm sure we can work something out."

He leaned forward and touched his interphone switch. "Miss Hammond, please ask everyone to wait. Dr. Langley and I are having an important discussion and must not be interrupted."

He switched the intercom off and faced Langley. "Now, Dr. Langley. As I remember it, you wanted to modify one of our standard robots and substitute the new model for the pilot of our next test rocket. Is that correct?"

Langley frowned, picked up his briefcase again, and sat down. He faced Conway with an only slightly moderated glare.

"That's right—if you prefer to think of a mature man as a 'modified' infant."

Conway coughed. "I see. I suppose you'd better explain it from scratch, then."

"If you'd bother to read memoranda before disapproving of them," Langley growled, "a verbal explanation wouldn't be necessary."

Conway's mouth twitched. "No doubt. I've told you I'm sorry, Dr. Langley. Please go on."

Langley ripped back the zipper of his briefcase and tossed a sheaf of papers on Conway's desk. "That's a full outline," he said. He looked at Conway with a barely controlled sneer. "Speaking nontechnically the innovation which I am prepared to produce—is a superman. The innovation is necessary because we have the means of accomplishing it, and it would constitute an improvement of incredible proportions not only over the usual robot pilot, but over even the best human being."

Conway's eyebrows shot up. "How so?"

"You know how we train our robots?"

Conway frowned. "Only roughly, I'm afraid."

The suggestion of a sneer on Langley's face became more pronounced. "Well, we don't 'train' them. We take a trained human specialist's personality—that is, we take it down on encephalotapes—and insert the tapes in a robot designed to perform the same specialized task. We insert a few blocks in the robot's specific memory circuits, so that for all practical purposes he suffers from controlled amnesia.

"In this manner we enable him to use the specialist's training and experience without becoming disconcerted by a set of human personal memories. We get the equivalent of a trained human being in a highly destruction-resistant body equipped with specialized appendages and independent of such requirements as air, food, and water.

"We get a specialized automaton that can be cut down to a mass of twenty-five pounds, if need be, and fired off to Deimos in a rocket and in an orbit such as no human

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being could use. We can produce ship captains, chefs, and schoolteachers. We could, if we wanted to, mass-produce Einsteins. The reason we have to go about it in an essentially left-handed way, taking existing personalities with all of their inherent and sometimes unpredictable weaknesses, is because we simply don't know enough about what makes up a human personality to construct one artificially.

"We can't even take a snip here and a snatch there, selecting desirable traits. We've discovered, to our expensive sorrow, that one man's desirable trait, mated to another's in a composite tape, can produce unpredictable side-effects —probably due to an incompatibility between the experiences that produced them.

"Now—you know as well as I do that mankind as a whole is shot through with self-defeating and undesirable traits. We've been battling them for millennia. All the world's religions, all political systems, all societies—almost all of our culture, in fact—are necessary only because mankind is prey to hate, greed, anger, fear, and jealousy—and a dozen dozen other weaknesses which make it impossible for him to live in harmony with his fellows. Most of our potential is wasted simply in keeping down the forces that destroy our potential."

Conway nodded. "All right. And precisely how does that apply to your project?"

"You know the problem which baffles us almost to a crippling extent in psychiatry?"

Conway shrugged. "Which problem is that?"

"It's impossible to look at a man's brain and trace the path of a thought," Langley went on. "It's impossible to point to a specific group of cells and say: 'That's jealousy—that's fear—that's hate.'

"And since we're at a standstill there, it's impossible to remove the cell groups surgically. You can only treat them indirectly. It's analogous to taking palliatives for an ulcer instead of resorting to an operation. *But—*" Langley slapped his stubby hand down on the briefcase, "we can do it with a robot *now.*

"We can start with a standard robot, put detectors on every circuit, and ascertain which circuits are activated by animal emotions. Then we can cut his power off—freeze him, in effect—and see precisely which portions of what tapes those circuits were scanning. And then we can edit the tapes. We can produce a being without fear, without greed, and without hatred. We can produce the perfect, full-potential man. I speak with absolute assurance."

Conway leaned back. "I see." He pursed his lips and coughed. "I'll have to admit that's more or less what I gathered from your original memoranda. I just wanted

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to make sure I hadn't misinterpreted anything."

Langley glared incredulously at him. "And you still rejected them." He leapt to his feet. "I thought you were just normally stupid. Instead, it's something else. What precisely is it? Are you *afraid* of supermen? Aren't you mature enough to realize that a sane being wouldn't *try* to conquer us or impose his will against the few sane and worthwhile aspirations mankind has left? Don't forget *he'd* be in effect a human being, with the same high aspirations and faith in human destiny that humans have—*in their very few sane moments*. But he'd be bigger, stronger than we are. He'd *always* be sane.

"I want to build him and shoot him off to Mars, as a test run of his ability to function. With that formality out of the way, we'd be free to turn out scores like him—and the human race will profit immeasurably. Or are you going to set yourself against me because of some emotionally primitive superstition in your fear-ridden brain?"

Conway looked down at his desk and coughed for the third time. "All right. Suppose I authorized the expenditure? You've got to realize that a project such as this can't possibly be fitted into either our normal fiscal budget, or our normal work schedule. It would have to be set up as a special project, with a special appropriation and a special staff to handle it. We wouldn't be able to spare you from your regular duties, for example. But I'm sure we could find a competent robotics engineering staff somewhere that would be able to do just as well, with an occasional consultation."

Langley's jaw dropped. Then he slammed his hand down on the desktop. "*No!*"

He stood mute for a moment, fighting for breath. Then he found words.

"Are you deliberately out to wreck this project? 'Competent robotics staff,'" he mimicked. "Competent robotics bushwah! *There isn't a man outside DBA fit* to tighten the bearings on a housemaid. There isn't a man who's spent four years thinking this thing over and over as I have, back and forth in his mind. If this project is authorized I've *got* to handle it!

"I'm the only qualified man—the only man with the facilities or the trained staff! If you stopped to think about anything but budgets and fiscal years for a minute, you'd realize what an asinine proposition you've just made. Call in your outsiders for the routine work, if you want to. But this project has got to be mine!"

Conway raised a hand. "All right, Dr. Langley. All right. I'm sorry."

Langley sat down slowly.

"Let's say I don't take the project away from you," Conway went on. "You must realize that this will be the most important under-

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taking human technology has ever attempted. The creation of a tool more intelligent than its maker must of necessity be that, you know. I don't think you should be asked to take on the *full* responsibility. Suppose I let you handle the project with your present staff. Wouldn't it be wise to hire some outside engineers—men of a stature comparable to yours—to act as a sort of committee, in concert with you?"

Langley almost hurled himself across the corner of the desk. He braced himself on quivering arms, and spoke with cold fury.

"That's insane! There's no possible reason for such an attitude. I've just finished telling you that nobody else is even remotely qualified! What's wrong with you, Conway?"

Conway leaned forward, apparently not the least upset. He smiled wanly. "Sit down, please, Dr. Langley. I had no intention of doing anything as obviously foolish as that."

Langley sank back. "Eh? What did you say?"

Conway tented his fingertips over his stomach and stared steadily at the engineer. "You've convinced me," he said, still smiling.

Langley returned his stare in stunned silence, his expression like that of a man who has just smashed down an unlocked door.

Conway went on: "Paradoxically, our conversation has confirmed and strengthened my previous decision. I'm completely convinced now that there's no value and some considerable danger in your project." He held up his hand quickly.

"Sit down!" he ordered sternly. He took a harsh breath. "Now it's *my* turn to shout. Who do you think you are, Langley—to pass judgment on a specialist outside your field? Are you of the opinion that I'm incompetent in my work? Did it ever occur to you that I'm here to watchdog DBA's money and, in a sense, its status as a company. Practical psychology happens to lie closer to my province than yours. If it didn't, you'd be the one to sit here talking contracts with people, instead of me. Now shut up for a minute!"

Conway splayed his hand over the sheaf of papers Langley had thrown on his desk. "This report is all very well and good, no doubt—from an engineering standpoint. But when you drift over into psychology, you'd be well advised to leave it to someone who has made it a part of his career. Either that or get out. I'm rejecting this project. It will stay rejected, permanently, except for one contingency:

"The day you build a robot without rage, without greed, without jealousy, and without an overweening ego; the day you build that full-potential superman, and the day that superman can conceive of a special project it desperately wants to work on because it knows

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it's the only person qualified for the job; the day your robot wants to do just that, and is scared sick that the chance will slip away, and the day it breaks every rule and smashes down a dozen carefully erected barriers and bulldozes its way in here to convince me I'm wrong and it's right, like you just did—that's the day you'll get your authorization."

Conway sat back, coughed, and let the cough become a chuckle for the first time. "But that's a paradox, isn't it?" he said. "That's a *human* paradox."

●

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the trespassers

by . . . Edward W. Ludwig

There were strange lights in the sky and the Tomb seemed to whisper: "Dare to be curious! You will inherit a new tomorrow!"

THE CHILDREN were the first to see the rocket. They ran screaming and laughing into the cave entrance.

"It's—coming!" they cried. "Grandpa! Grandma! Mama! Papa! The ship from the lights in the sky is coming!"

The old man and the old woman arose from the bed of dry desert grass on which they had been reclining, and thrust their way through their brood of children and grandchildren. They stumbled to the mouth of the cave in speechless wonder, their wide Martian eyes staring up into the dawn sky.

The rocket was like a great, wingless, silver bird with tail plumage of fire. It came from the East—from the direction of the rock-strewn mountains of Dhan. It swooped downward into the thin air, grumbling and screeching like an infuriated demon.

At last it slowed and turned its silver head upward. It sank slowly down to the smooth red Martian desert, descending on a cushion of thundering flame.

A writer who is genuinely mature exhibits at all times a simplicity of style and a directness of approach which no tyro can hope to master without years of painstaking dedication to his craft. Prose that sings and soars and a child-like—not childish—wonder in the presence of the unknown immeasurably enhance the realness *of a story such as this by adding a new dimension to magic casements opening wide on the Martian dawn. Edward Ludwig is both a science fantasy and a mystery writer, with many fine yarns to his credit.*

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"It's come, Kaah," murmured the old woman. "I knew it would."

"Yes, we were right after all, Eece. After all this time, we were right!"

They trembled in their excitement. The hot wind from the jets whipped back their long white hair and nearly tore the red garments from their lean bodies. But laughing, hand in hand, they ran down the gently sloping stone embankment that fronted the mouth of the cave.

The rocket descended so slowly that each second seemed a bit of eternity, compressed and solidified so as to form a lifetime.

Through the old man's mind passed memories of a night long ago on this same desert. A night so very long ago when frightened words were whispered into wind-stirred silence . . .

"I'm afraid, Kaah."

"There's nothing to be afraid of."

"But there *is*. If they see us—"

"They won't. The priests never patrol this far from the entrance."

"I'm afraid, Kaah, *afraid*. I—I'm not sure if we should ever have started the tunnel."

He put his arm around her slight waist, as if hoping that the strength from his own sixteen-year-old body would flow into hers. He felt her trembling. Even in the darkness of the Martian night he saw the fear reflected in her wide, white eyes. She was like a frightened, helpless little desert animal.

He guided her across the dark sands. They reached a small oval mound of hard, red sandstone whose top was marked with a slender white stick.

"We've been here a hundred times before," he said in his soft, melodic Martian tongue. "You weren't afraid then."

"It was like a game before. But now the digging is finished. Tonight we enter the Tomb. The priests say that Dhan will shower misfortune on those who violate the holy places for twenty-four thousand and one days."

"We decided that the priests are wrong," he murmured. "The Tombs weren't made by long-dead gods. They were made by our own people thousands of years ago. They aren't holy places. It's the stupid, superstitious fear of old men that keeps us from entering them."

She faced him in the darkness, her voice pleading. "But old men can kill, and they *would* kill if—"

He put his long, reddish forefinger on her quivering lips. "Look up there," he said. "Look at the stars. Are you still afraid?"

They gazed upward.

"Stay close to me," Eece said.

To Kaah, the stars were like friendly eyes of silver fire. The whisper of wind was like the echo of a million lost voices wandering over the desert. The limitless sand was like a coffin housing the

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planet's most fabulous miracles and most ancient dreams.

But true miracles, thought Kaah, can never die, and dreams can be reborn.

His voice was charged with sudden warmth and eagerness: "One time our people journeyed to the silver lights in the sky. They saw wondrous sights and strange people. They were not prisoners as we are now, living our lives in a single stone hut, seeing nothing but desert. The lights are worlds like our own world, Eece. This is true, for it was told to my grandfather by *his* grandfather."

His gaze shifted to the dim, fuzzy web of lights in the distant village, the glow reflected dully in the still waters of the Canal of Life that twisted through the desert.

"There they sit," he whispered, "like soulless machines with no thoughts in their hollow heads except of eating, sleeping, and making love on beds of grass. Yet above them are a thousand thousand worlds and a thousand thousand adventures. And beneath the sands are perhaps all the secrets known by Dhan himself. Yet they, like blind men, see nothing."

Eece nodded. "But they are content, Kaah. You should not hate them because they are not like you."

"I do not hate them. Each man should live and do as he wishes. I only hate that they expect me to be like them."

He looked again at the stars. "We may find the secret that will show us how to reach the lights in the sky. Just *think*, Eece. We may be able to leave the desert, and journey to a thousand new worlds!"

He waited for Eece to answer. There was no answer.

He stepped back, a sudden doubt taking shape in his mind. "You are against me, Eece? You are like all the others in the village?"

She stood very straight and very beautiful. The pale white light from rising Deimos and Phobos cast a jewel-speckled glow over her long black hair. The light caressed her smooth skin and firm young body. In her blue, skin-tight garment she looked more like a woman than a girl of fourteen.

She said softly, "I *am* frightened, Kaah, for you speak strangely. But Dhan has decided that I am to be your woman. If there is a sky-hunger within you, there shall be the same within me. Where you journey, even if to the dimmest of the lights in the sky, I shall journey too."

Abruptly, borne by the gentle wind, there were faint echoes of new voices—not of the dead, but of the living.

Kaah's gaze traveled slowly over the desert, over the smooth, bulging shape of the sand-buried Tomb. In the direction of the ancient stone pillars which flanked the Tomb's cave-like entrance he saw three pin-points of bobbing

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light. Instantly he recognized the deep, flickering crimson glow of *lazelle*-oil lamps.

"The patrol of the priests," Kaah whispered. "They've never come this far before."

"Perhaps they found the tunnel!"

"No, no."

"Perhaps the guards inside the Tomb heard us digging!"

He scowled. Kneeling, he frantically pushed aside the black rock that hid the entrance of the tunnel.

"Quickly, then! Inside!"

They scrambled into the small black hole, Kaah first. Downward they snaked on their bellies and knees and hands. Downward, like red worms slithering down a tiny dry throat.

They worked their way past the stone slabs that supported the crumbling sandstone. Each foot of the black passage represented a suffocating night of digging with stone knives, of choking on century-dry dust, of manipulating sweat-stained rock and sand through the body-small space.

Down, down, down.

How strange, Kaah thought, to crawl into the bowels of the planet in order to reach the sky.

As the floor of the tunnel became horizontal, Kaah lit the tiny grease lamp he carried in his skin pouch. The flickering, smoky glare relieved his sensation of lostness, of suffocation, although the irritating smoke often drifted into his eyes and nostrils.

Never had the passage seemed so long as on this night. But at last Kaah arrived at the final barrier—the ancient and already crumbling wall of the Tomb itself.

He worked feverishly with his knife until his cramped arms ached and sweat trickled into his eyes.

Suddenly Eece, behind him, touched his leg. "Stop. Listen."

He listened. For a few seconds there was only the sound of a tiny rivulet of sand hissing down from the low roof of the tunnel.

Then he heard low voices, their rumbling echoes oddly magnified by the tunnel walls.

"The priests," he murmured, his face paling. "They're by the mouth of the tunnel. By the gods of Sor, we forgot to cover the entrance!"

"Perhaps they won't notice."

The echoes became louder.

"They're in the tunnel!" Kaah exclaimed. "They're following us!"

His fingers tightened about the hot handle of his stone knife. He jabbed the worn blade into the soft Tomb wall. Sand and rock cascaded into his face. He blinked and spat. His hand struck again and again as if the wall were an antagonist in lethal battle.

Louder and louder grew the voices, nearer and nearer. A reddish glow softened the blackness of the passage behind them.

"Kaah, they're almost here!"

Suddenly the sound of the voices was obscured by a deep-throated

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rumble. From behind them came a resounding crack—the shattering of a stone support. The floor of the tunnel trembled.

Another crack. A hissing and then a swishing of sand.

WHOOMPH!

The roof of the tunnel fell like the savagely descending hand of a giant. Clouds of swirling red dust billowed outward, enveloping Kaah and Eece. It was as if the desert had showered its wrath upon the beings that had worm-holed their way into its ancient, sacred depths.

Kaah and Eece buried their heads in folded arms, their bodies tensed to withstand the rain of stone and sand. But that rain never came.

The thunder died. Kaah raised his head, and wiped sand and dust from his hot, smarting eyes. He twisted his body backward, squinted over his shoulder. No more than a few inches from Eece's feet was a solid wall of rocks and sand.

"Eece," he breathed, are you—"

"I'm all right," she said, her voice charged with fear. "It missed us. But the priests, behind us. Were they killed?"

"I think they're safe. They must have been behind the place of the cave-in. I pray to Dhan that they were."

Then he stared ahead. Although his lamp was still burning, he saw no wall. A great black hole gaped behind the area of settling dust.

He laughed almost hysterically. "The wall of the Tomb fell too, Eece! We're there! We're inside the Tomb!"

He thrust his lamp into the darkness. The feeble light revealed only dim suggestions of objects in the black distance. But below, he could distinguish the smooth outline of a stone floor.

"It's only a few feet down," he said. "We can make it."

He passed the lamp back to Eece. There was no room in the tunnel in which to turn around. He edged forward until his hands dangled over black nothingness.

He slid downward slowly, his legs spread eagled against the tunnel walls, his hands outstretched. Downward, ever so slowly. Then he fell. With a cry of terror he hit the floor some five feet beneath the tunnel.

His neck snapped backward. Breath swooshed out of his lungs. The hard stone was like cold flame to his palms. He landed like a limp-limbed, sprawling doll.

He rose, breathing heavily. He rubbed his sore neck and blew on the hot, torn skin of his palms.

"All right, Eece. You're next."

He reached up and grasped the girl under the armpits. He pulled her down, then seized the lamp.

They stood now in silence. For the first time the ancient solemnity of the Tomb seemed to press down upon Kaah. He realized that he was insignificant, a single second in the clock of eternity. The Tomb seemed to hold all Time and all

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wisdom in its dark bowels. It was the storehouse of the race and of the planet, a place of ghosts undisturbed for ten thousand, perhaps a hundred thousand years.

And he was the intruder, the defier of the dust, the groveling worm seeking to resurrect the forgotten glories. Was it right to unshroud the dead dreams, to awaken the sleeping ghosts?

Frowning, he thought of the stars. The glory of Dhan is not to be forgotten, he reasoned. Why then should the glory of our race be forgotten? If men have the talent to dream, should not that talent be kept alive?

He led Eece with one hand, holding the lamp with the other. They appeared to be in a tremendous man-built stone cavern.

Eece shivered. "Kaah, I—I'm afraid. The tunnel is gone. How will we get back? It would take so long to dig a new way out. We have no food. And suppose the priests were trapped in the tunnel. Suppose—"

"The priests were not trapped. I *know* they were not. They were too far away. And we will get out, I promise."

"But perhaps the curse has already started, Kaah. Twenty-four thousand and one days. There are six hundred and eighty-seven days in a year. That would be thirty-five years—almost a lifetime!"

"There will be no curse, and no wrath save that of men."

Eece squeezed his hand. "But the ways of Dhan are strange. Perhaps *he* does not want our people to go to the lights in the sky. Perhaps our people aren't ready."

His voice was tinged with impatience. "We've waited long for this moment. Would you forget all our dreams, our plans? Would you be like the cowardly sand-mice of the desert?"

"No, Kaah."

"Then let us hurry. We must discover the secret of journeying into the sky. And we must find it before *we* are discovered."

They strode forward. The beams from the lamp fell upon a wall of stone shelves laden with fat, dust-blanketed books.

Kaah handed the lamp to Eece.

He withdrew one of the ancient volumes, blew off the dust, and opened it. Yet even as his gaze fell upon the thick parchment pages they crumbled into dust that spiraled to the floor. Kaah stood with gaping mouth, only the naked, rotting binding remaining in his grasp.

Gingerly, he withdrew a second volume. He laid it on the floor and opened it more carefully than before. For an instant he beheld written words, strangely shaped but similar to those he had learned in the village school. Then, as if from the eagerness of his gaze—but more probably from the warmth of his breath—the pages faded and crumbled.

What knowledge, what wisdom had the book contained? Perhaps

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the secret of the race's stormy beginnings? Or the magic that once carried people into the sky? Or the holiest words of Dhan himself?

Whatever the knowledge and wisdom, they were lost and gone. The books were like delicate snowflakes, beautiful and beckoning, but unobtainable, fading into nothingness when one sought to possess them.

Kaah and Eece moved out of the cavern of the books. They entered an even larger room choked with the hulking remains of unfathomable machinery.

The machines were like sand-caked skeletons of fantastic monsters. The rough, oxydized limbs were twisted and fallen, the faces of dials and panels distorted or erased by time and sand. What manner of machines they had been, Kaah could not guess. They crumbled like the books under his touch.

In another cavern they beheld a line of black spheres three times the height of a man. These did not collapse, and the metal echoed hollowly under Kaah's rapping knuckles. But fallen doors revealed the emptiness of their interiors.

"If we only knew what they were for!" Kaah murmured.

Above the spheres, the lamp illumined a vast series of pictures —a mural—on the wall of the cavern.

Kaah studied the mural intensely, moving from one end of it to the other.

In its center was a large globe, dimly red, with pink streamers radiating out from it. About the great object were smaller globes of various sizes.

". . . six, seven, eight, nine," Kaah counted.

Covering the surface of the fourth globe were a myriad of man-like figures—Martians.

On the third was a smaller number of similar figures, except that the heads were extremely narrow and too small for their bodies. The grotesque forms of immense, long-necked animals alternated with the strange man-shapes.

And between the third and fourth globes were black circles that reminded Kaah of the hollow black spheres.

For a long moment Kaah studied the mural. The flickering flame of the lamp carved deep, solemn shadows in his quiet face.

At last Eece turned to him. "What's the matter, Kaah?"

His voice was low, yet threaded with excitement. "The pictures tell a story of something that happened a long time ago. The legends say that the lights in the sky are worlds like our own. The big red globe in the picture could be the sun. The little globe with the men on it could be our own world. About the sun float other worlds—eight besides our own. And the black globes are like the spheres. Perhaps our people traveled in them

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from here to the third globe, Eece."

"Why just to the third globe? Why not to the others?"

Kaah bit his lip. "Look at the picture. There are many, many men on the fourth globe. Perhaps there was not enough water here for them, so they traveled through the sky to find a better place to live—and that place was the third world."

"But some must have stayed here. Why did they stay? And why didn't the others return home to visit us?"

"Maybe only the more daring ones left our world. Maybe they became one with the narrow-headed people of the third world, and they were so busy learning new ways of life that they forgot about us. Maybe the ones who stayed here also forgot. Maybe they were content simply to live as we do today, and they came to believe that their ancestors were gods.

Eece shivered. "These are strange thoughts."

Kaah nodded. The triumph of resurrecting forgotten knowledge was colored with a depressing sense of hopelessness and frustration. Of what use was the rebirth of a dream when the means of achieving that dream were lost? Of what possible use?

Suddenly Eece stiffened. "Kaah! I hear voices!"

The voices hummed through the still, dark air. The direction of their origin was indiscernible. The vibrations echoed through the stone chambers as though they were born in the air itself.

"The priests are hunting for us," Kaah muttered. His heart began to pound. "Ahead! Quickly!"

They started to run forward.

The voices grew louder.

Kaah stopped. "They're ahead of us—in the next cavern!"

They spun around. Back they ran, back into the cavern of the machines, into the room of the crumbling books.

More voices, sharp with anger, ominously threatening. The sound of sandaled feet on cold stone. The glow of a lamp beneath a time-blackened archway.

"Back," whispered Kaah.

Stumbling over the debris of a nameless machine they raced back into the room of the spheres. The voices were near now, terrifyingly loud and threatening.

"Inside the sphere," panted Kaah.

They squeezed through a narrow opening. Their feet sloshed through heavy grit and sand.

Eece's elbow brushed against a sunken-faced panel. A lever fell, crashing onto the metal floor. The noise resounded through the sphere and through the cavern.

Kaah cursed in the name of Dhan, and blew out the flame of his lamp. He and Eece stood huddled in darkness.

Then there was new light—the thickening light of many lamps sweeping into the cavern. There was the stamping of many feet

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and the shouting of many voices.

"They must be here," said a voice. "There's no way out."

"They *were* here," said another. "We heard them."

"Look! Footprints in the dust!"

"Footprints leading to—"

"—to the sphere!"

A flaming lamp appeared in the doorway of the sphere. Behind it was a tall, red-robed body and a bulbous face with a straggly white beard and narrowed, metal-cold eyes.

Eece screamed.

Kaah straightened and leaped forward. "Come on, Eece!"

He pushed the startled priest aside and stumbled out of the sphere. Instantly a shower of hands fell upon him. The hands were neither savage nor swift, but they were strong and commanding.

As Kaah fought with flailing fists he seemed engulfed in an ever-growing deluge of hands. And behind them lay a kaleidoscopic vision of grim round faces and red, swishing robes.

The hands surrounded him, seized him, imprisoned him. Kaah stood helpless, panting, his head bowed and his hair disheveled while the priests began a low-toned, sombre chant that filled the cavern like the mournful murmur of winter wind.

Kaah, lifting his head, saw tears in Eece's wide, frightened eyes. A chill of fear ran down his spine.

The priests were singing the Chant for the Damned . . .

The red-robed men discarded their small lamps and seized flaming, smoking torches. They pushed and pulled Kaah and Eece, their hands now securely bound behind them—out of the Tomb, and across the red desert to the village. Their sandaled feet made lazy sloshing movements through the thick sand. The chant flowed continuously from their thin lips.

At length Kaah and Eece were in the village center, beneath the towering stone image of Dhan. About them, aroused from sleep by the chant, were the villagers.

There were boys with whom Kaah had swam in the Canal of Life, and teachers who had smiled patiently at his absorption in antiquities. There was Ange, the village lamp-maker; and old Roule, the shaggy-bearded, one-eyed poet. And there were his father and mother, their eyes fastened to his as if by invisible cords.

But the faces were no longer friendly and kind. They were transformed into stern, ugly masks by the flaming torches and the dancing shadows. They were the faces of hostile strangers that held only far-away echoes of familiarity.

An Elder Priest intoned: "You dug into the sacred Tomb. When we attempted to follow, you fled. You defied the curse of Dhan, and only by the mercy of the gods were

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we ourselves spared when your tunnel collapsed. What defense have you to offer, godless ones?"

Kaah stood very straight, his head high. "We—we sought a way to journey to new worlds, to the worlds that shine as lights in the sky."

"He is mad!" exclaimed a priest.

"I am not mad." Kaah's eyes blinked nervously. "The whole story is there in the Tomb, in the pictures. The lights in the sky are worlds like ours. Once our people traveled to those worlds. We could travel, too, if—"

"The Tombs were the homes of our dead gods. They are forbidden to all mortals except priests. He who violates the sacred places will be cursed for twenty-four thousand and one days."

Kaah now hung his head. For a moment, sorrow pushed aside his fear. There would be no more journeying to the stars for his people. The minds of the villagers were as locked doors.

And even if they were willing to open the doors, the keys no longer existed. A line of hollow spheres, a library of crumbling books . . .

And yet—

Kaah's head rose. A new idea sprang into his consciousness.

"You may be right," he mused. "Perhaps there *is* a curse; perhaps Dhan does not want us to travel again into the sky. Perhaps, having once given us the secret of such travel, he will not give it again—for we have proved ourselves unworthy of it. This could be our punishment for allowing it to be forgotten."

"Fool!" spat a priest. "What madness is this?"

"*It is not madness.* If we can't travel to other worlds, then those on other worlds will come to us. There are people on the third world from the sun. Dhan is a merciful god, and he will not deny the secret to them. Someday they will come to us from out of the sky, and they will not be gods, but people like us. Someday—"

"Silence! Not even Roule the poet speaks such madness." The Elder Priest raised his arms skyward. The chant stopped.

"What is The Word?" he shouted into the silence. "Death?"

The villagers made no sound and no movement.

"*Death?*" screamed the priest.

Still the crowd was silent.

Kaah held his breath. Silence was an expression of disapproval.

The Elder Priest scowled angrily.

"Forgiveness?" he asked as if the word were acid on his tongue.

More silence.

The priest grunted his satisfaction. Then he cried, "*Exile?*"

There were noddings of heads and waggings of beards. The villagers released a murmur of approval.

The priest lowered his arms.

"It is the judgment of Dhan that the trespassers be banished

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from this village. For twenty-four thousand and one days they shall not return to the sight of men. They shall neither be sought nor spoken to. Dhan, through this humble follower, has spoken."

Kaah and Eece were released from their bonds. They moved away from the great stone image of Dhan. The silent crowd cleared a path for them.

Kaah murmured, "Do not be afraid, Eece. We will live. There's a place where the Mountains of Dhan meet the Canal of Life. We'll find shelter there. We'll eat canal-fish and sand-mice and—"

She squeezed his hand. "I am not afraid now, Kaah. Where you go, I will go, too."

As they reached the edge of the village, Kaah paused and turned. His face grim, he said to those in the torch-red shadows: "Someday those from the third world will come to this village—and we will be with them."

They stepped out into the darkness . . .

THE SILVER rocket descended slowly, like a stone sinking into clear, quiet water. The heat from its flame-belching underjets transformed the red sand to shiny black stone.

The rocket settled onto the desert. Slowly the flame died, and the door of an airlock slid open.

"Martians," muttered a man in a transparalite helmet. "I knew it. There just *had* to be Martians."

The old man and the old woman ran to meet the rocket. Behind them, a swarm of black-haired children and young people watched intently.

"They look human, Captain Chandler," a second helmeted man said. "Almost like Earthmen—except that their heads are like balloons!"

The old Martian knelt before them on spindly legs. His bony, shaking finger traced circular figures in the sand.

"I'll be damned. Look at that. He's made a big circle. Around that he's made nine smaller circles. He's pointing at us and at the third circle. Earth—the third from the sun. How the hell did he know that?"

The old man rose. Smiling proudly, he pointed to the mile-wide square of white stones that enclosed a white-stoned triangle.

"Good grief, Captain. He must have laid those stones so we'd see them and land here."

"Yes," Chandler said, nodding.

Now the old man's finger touched his red, wrinkled chest, and then that of the old woman. He pointed to a spot far away on the desert and then to the rocket and to the sky. His eyes asked a silent question.

"Know what he means, Captain?"

"I think so, Sam. He wants us to come with him somewhere, maybe to a town. Then I think he

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wants a ride in the *Martian Queen* —maybe a ride all the way back to Earth."

"Should we let them come with us?" asked the man called Sam.

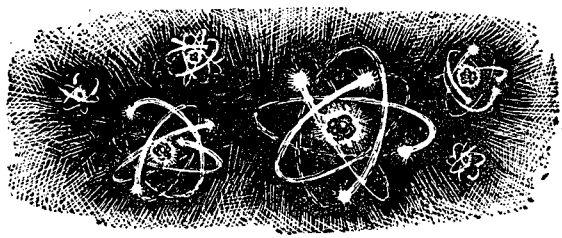
"Sure," said Captain Chandler. "This wouldn't be a successful first-flight-to-Mars if we didn't bring back a Martian or two." He chuckled softly. "Yes, he'll get his ride, he and the woman both if they really want it."

He nodded toward the rocket.

The old man seemed to understand. His leathery face exploded in a grin that was like a summer sunrise.

Then, hand in hand, he and the woman tiptoed up to the rocket. They ran caressing fingers over its metal smoothness. Their hungry eyes absorbed its silver gleam. They turned back to Captain Chandler, grinning—yet at the same time tears were streaking down their wizened faces.

"It beats me," murmured the puzzled man called Sam. "They're so glad to see us they're even crying!"



Algis Budrys has written many unusual stories for us, but in next month's lead novelette, THE MECHANICAL MAN, *we believe he has really surpassed himself. He has taken an historically-hallowed pronouncement: "The Marines have landed!" and transformed it into a gateway to tomorrow with a light that has never before blazed forth so resplendently on sea or land, or anywhere in the universe of stars. So come one and all and stand with him on a spatial base remote from Earth, and from a high plateau watch the soldiers of the future set up a monument of enduring, star-mirroring granite to man's conquest of space.*

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enough is enough

by . . . J. Anthony Ferlaine

He was in a romantic mood—and his wife wanted the old romantic line. Why did he have to ring in a dreadful, unEarthly variation?

WE WERE dancing out on the middle of the floor in the ballroom where we had met. The orchestra was playing "Stardust" and she had her face pressed close to the top of my chest singing the words softly to me.

I was in a good mood—romantic as the devil. It was our first wedding anniversary and we were celebrating.

She stopped singing right before the number was over and pulled her head away and then didn't say anything for the rest of the number—even after the lights went on.

"What's the matter, honey?" I asked. "You mad or something?"

"No! I'm not mad!"

"You are. I can tell. Come on, what's wrong?"

"You don't love me anymore!"

"Oh, now honey," I pleaded. "Cut it out, will you? You know I love you. What's the matter with you?"

"You never tell me anymore. I mean, not like you used to—before we were married."

"All right," I said, kissing her on the cheek. "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

As emerald bright as the green hills of Venus is this sparkling saga in miniature—an entertainment special decked out with interplanetary garlands from a world without wives where men who don't know what they're missing pride themselves on their independence until they wake up screaming. Or perhaps it's the wives who do the screaming. Anyhow, all hail to J. Anthony Ferlaine, a writer of rare discernment, a brilliant newcomer to our pages.

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"You're just saying it," she whispered. "You don't mean it. Before we were married you used to tell me all kinds of pretty things. Now you just take me for granted—like I was an old shoe!"

"Honey, for heaven's sake!" I said. "Sure I love you! What do you *want* me to say?"

"Well," she said, putting her arms around me, "to tell you the truth I miss all those fibs you used to tell me. You know—that old line of yours. What I mean is—you don't tell me stories any more. I miss them."

"Honey, that was before we were married. Married men don't go around giving their wives a line."

"Why not?" She seemed genuinely puzzled.

"I don't know," I confessed. "It's just part of the 'before' part. The courtship, the . . . the . . . I don't know. After you're married you just settle down and tell each other the truth."

"I don't like it," she said. "Why do we have to be like everybody else?"

I looked at her concernedly as the music started again and we started to dance. She put her head back on my chest and neither of us said anything for a while.

"Johnnie."

"Yes, Hon."

"Why don't you just make up a line and tell it to me, like we had never been married. I mean, pretending like."

"Okay," I said. "You want a line. I'll give you a line. Do you want the one about me really being a millionaire and just giving this place the once over? Or the one about me seeing you from across the dance floor and falling in love with you at first sight?"

"Something new!" she said. "Something different."

"Something new! Okay. Let me think."

The funny thing was, I couldn't think of a darn thing. It all sounded so silly.

"Oh, I know," I said. "I got it. Are you ready, Hon?"

"Ready. Pretend we're just going together now."

"In this one we're married," I said. "Now . . . do you think that I look like a normal healthy American boy with average intelligence, average looks and so forth?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to tell you a secret. It's a secret that no one else on Earth knows about. Promise not to tell?"

She shook her head.

"Good. Now, the secret is that I'm not really from Earth at all. In fact, I'm not even a human being."

"No? What are you?" she giggled.

"I'm a Venusian. A Venusian from Venus. And I'm just here looking things over. That's why I married you—an Earth woman—just to see what it would be like. We don't have any women on Venus. All men. Nothing but men."

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"And just how do you have any babies on Venus if there are no women?"

"Well, we have what we call 'Baby Machines.' Of course, they make nothing but male babies. We used to have women a long time ago, but they were so much trouble we just let them die off."

"How perfectly horrible!"

"Not really," I said. "Not for the men anyway. You see we found that all the women were just putting on weight and going to beauty parlors and not doing any work. We had machines to do most of the work anyhow, so there wasn't much sense in their going through the motions. Besides, they were always nagging or griping about something or other. They got to be a pain in the neck. After a while their only useful function was to have babies and when we invented the baby machine we didn't need them at all anymore."

"What a bunch of monsters!"

"Of course, I don't remember the women of Venus in my lifetime," I said. "That's why I decided to come to Earth just as soon as the first spaceship was built."

"And how do you like women now that you've come here?" she laughed.

"Fine! Just fine!" I said. "I've been thinking about talking to the council and shipping a couple of them home—just for the heck of it."

"Will you take me?"

"Uh-uh!" I said. "I don't think so. You're too pretty. All the rest of the fellows would be trying to steal you away from me."

"It would serve you right."

"Besides," I said, "I couldn't take you on this trip. The ship is much too crowded already."

"You're leaving soon? You're going back?"

"Yes," I sighed. "Unfortunately, one of these days I'll just have to kiss you good-bye and take off for Venus."

"Johnnie," she said, "I'm getting scared. Please don't talk any more. I'm sorry I started it."

The music stopped and we went over to the snack bar to get a shake.

"You know," I said, "you wouldn't believe it, but I really look quite a bit different in my natural state. You see, Venus is a very lush place. It's full of swamps and trees and things, and we practically never have anything to eat but leaves and green vegetables. That's why everybody on Venus—the men, that is—are all as green as green can be. Like hunks of spinach."

She almost choked on the soda straw. "Johnnie, please! No more! I'm frightened! Let's talk about something else."

"Sure, you ought to be frightened—living with an alien being from another planet. You ought to see me when I forget to take a pill at night and I wake up bright green in the morning. You see, the stuff wears off in about twenty-four hours. I've got to keep taking it. Of course, I've been careful

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since we got married. I didn't want to frighten you. You should see me when—"

"*John Stassney!* If you say *one* more word, I'll walk right out of here. Enough is enough!"

"Doggone it, Hon," I protested. "You started it."

"So, I started it. So, I'm finishing it. Will you take me home, please?"

We got our hats and coats and went home. I tried to break the ice a couple of times, but it was no soap. She was really peeved this time. I was sorry now that I had ever said anything at all. Why couldn't I have had sense enough to keep my big mouth shut like a good husband should.

When we got back to the apartment she changed into her pajamas and crawled into bed without even setting her hair. I think if we had a spare bedroom she would have gone in and locked the door. One hell of an anniversary it had turned out to be.

I sat out in the kitchen smoking a couple of cigarettes and wondering what to do. Finally, I decided to just crawl into bed myself and say nothing. Tomorrow was another day.

The next morning I woke up with a headache and remembered that I had lain there thinking until almost three-thirty, and all it got me was loss of sleep.

The shower was going in the bathroom, so I wandered out into the kitchen to make some coffee.

The shower stopped and she called out through the door. "Are you up, Johnnie?"

"Yeah! That's me," I said. "Are you still mad?"

"No! How about you?"

"No! I've got a headache. I didn't sleep much last night."

"Take one of your pills," she said. "They're on top of the TV set."

I found the bottle and took a pill. Then I walked back to the bathroom door and pushed it open.

She was standing there naked. I gulped and started running for the door.

She was a brilliant shade of green from head to toe! *Green!* Green—like a hunk of spinach!

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the bloodless laws

by . . . by Henry Slesar

It was a world of hate and of savage cruelty. But one small citadel of human valor remained —to lead men back to wisdom.

BEING ALL OF twelve, and therefore one of the oldest women in the country, Betsy naturally commanded some respect. But Truman Adams wasn't overawed by her presence when she broke up the meeting of the Top Secret Boys Club.

"Aw, leave us alone," he told her, at the doorway of the Clubhouse. He thrust out his lower lip. "We don't want no girls around here!"

"You better let me in, Truman Adams," she said threateningly, tossing her auburn hair over one shoulder. "You know what the Council says about secret societies."

"Phooey!" said Truman sullenly. "We're just-havin'-a-little-fun."

"You're having a 'nitiation," the girl said wisely. "I saw Lincoln Wilson coming in here with candles."

"We gotta have *light,* don't we?" the boy answered reasonably. "I mean, you can't expect us to sit around in the dark?"

"What's the matter with the 'lectric?" she said. "You better let

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me in, or I'll tell the Council what you're up to."

"Snitchtattle!" said Truman angrily. "Just 'cause you're a girl!"

A small boy in long trousers rolled up a foot at the cuff came to the doorway, and looked at them curiously. He wasn't more than seven, but his eyes were old and knowing. "What's the matter?" he said, looking back and forth at the girl and the boy. "What's *she* doin' here?"

"Go on back inside, Lincoln," said the older boy. "Old snitchtattle wants to bust up the club. She says she's gonna tell the Council."

"Aw, gee, Betsy," said the young one pleadingly. "We're not hurtin' anybody. We're just playin' a game!"

"Games are all right," said Betsy primly. "But you were havin' a 'nitiation. I saw those candles and masks and things."

"But I *told* you!" said Truman exasperatedly. "It's just for *fun*. My goodness, can't we have any *fun* no more?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. She fluffed up the back of her luxuriant hair and started to turn away. "Okay," she said sweetly, "if it's only for fun, you won't mind if I tell the Council then."

She began to walk off, and the boys shared anxious looks between them.

"Wait a minute," said the seven-year-old eagerly. "Wait a minute, Betsy!"

She paused. "Yes?" she asked.

"Look, Betsy." The youngster licked his lips. "How'd *you* like to join our Club?"

"Hmph!" she said, with a disdainful gesture. "Top Secret *Boys* Club!"

"We'll change the name," said Truman Adams encouragingly. "We'll call it the Top Secret Boys and *Girls* Club."

"Yes," agreed Lincoln Wilson, clutching at her sleeve. "And you can be Vice-President."

She looked at them calculatingly. "Who's President?"

"I am," said Truman defiantly.

Betsy shook her head, the auburn curls bobbing about her pinched little face. "Uh-uh," she said. "I'm President or nothing!"

The two boys gaped at her. Then the younger signaled Truman for a conference inside the grass-thatched shack. They were gone less than five minutes, while Betsy Coolidge plucked idly at some bracken, trying to appear nonchalant. When they returned, she acted only half as interested in the decision as she really was.

"Okay," said Truman Adams bitterly. "You can be President. But I'm gonna be Vice-President and Chairman of the Rules Committee!"

"And I'm Secretary of War," piped Lincoln Wilson.

"All right," she answered superciliously. Then she dropped the pose. "Let's go inside," she said enthusiastically. "Gotta get this 'nitiation over with!"

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She dashed into the building, and over to the candle-lit meeting table. There were five small boys grouped around the table, wearing gas masks. The other two followed her inside, looking miserable.

THE ENEMY was having a meeting, too.

Costa was surprised at the urgent dispatch which had summoned him to Headquarters. He had been relaxing at his home in the Florida Keys when the message arrived. A launch had moored at his private dock, without his bidding, and his first reaction was displeasure when he saw the official flag flapping at its stern.

"What is this?" he said curtly to the uniformed man who leaped nimbly from the boat. His lips curled at the courier's comic-opera costume: the tight-fitting tunic, the peaked cap, the trig jodhpurs, and the gleaming knee-length boots.

The soldier tossed him a crisp salute. "Message from Staff Headquarters, Virginia Base," he said tightly. "Urgent, sir."

Costa frowned. The war had been over five years—no, it was almost six—and young bucks like this one still paraded about in full military regalia — battle stripes, medals, and all. And what was worse, they acted as if the final battles were still theirs to win.

He took the sealed dispatch from the gloved hand and ripped it open. He looked up at the sky before he read the contents. There was a bold brushstroke of steel-gray cloud stretching over the water, and the red ball of the sun dipped behind it. The waters of the Gulf Stream responded by churning angrily in jagged gray waves. Costa felt a sudden chill, and tightened his collar around his throat.

He read the message. It was simple enough. It called for a high-level meeting of the Occupation Authority at one that afternoon, and Costa's presence was requested.

"What's it all about?" he asked the soldier, who stood rigidly at attention before him.

"Sorry, sir. My orders were to bring you this dispatch. That's all I know."

"Next time, radio for permission before you bring any craft in here," Costa said sternly. "This is private property, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir!"

"Does this require a reply?"

"Only if you wish, sir," said the sergeant. "If for any reason you can't attend—"

"Then you *do* know the contents?" said Costa contemptuously.

The soldier flushed. "One hears rumors, sir," he said.

"There's no reply," said Costa, pocketing the message. "Now get that rowboat out of here and watch the reefs." He glanced at the turbulent morning sea. "Think you can manage it? It gets rough out here sometimes."

"I'll manage, sir," said the soldier proudly. "I'm Navy-trained."

"Good for you," said Costa dry-

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ly. He turned his back on the message bearer and went limping back towards the house.

The sergeant watched his halting progress, and then his smooth white face lost some of its impassiveness. He spat into a clump of grass. "Wise guy," he muttered bitterly.

Costa went inside the house, stumbled over something, and cursed loudly. It was dark in the room, so he flicked on the overhead. It was a quite spacious and comfortable room, but surprisingly untidy.

He looked over at the ship's-wheel clock on the mantel, and saw that it was already close to seven o'clock. If the meeting was to be at one, he had scarcely three hours of uninterrupted quiet before he would have to warm up the copter engine in preparation for the journey. And he was tired, tired down to the bone after a restless night.

He set the alarm on the clock, and threw himself on the oversize sofa. It took him twenty minutes to fall asleep, but when he did, it was the same old story. In the inevitable world of dreams he saw the Clouds again—the fleecy, germ-laden clouds, landing with a powder-puff softness on the city below, settling with eerie silence to do the deadly work not even bombs could do so well.

THE INITIATIONS were over. The members of the Top Secret Club had sworn the dreadful oath which bound them inextricably to one another. Betsy Coolidge, the new Club President, rapped the smooth stone gavel for silence.

She looked helplessly at her Vice-President and Chairman of the Rules Committee. "Now what, Truman?" she said.

The boy glanced over to Lincoln Wilson, the Secretary of War. He nodded back gravely, stood up, and said: "Arms inspection, Madam President."

"*Arms* inspection? What's that?"

The young boy looked mysterious. He got up from the table and went over to a closed trunk in one corner of the room. He did something to the lock, and it opened. He brought back the weapon he found inside—a plastic rifle with a bore that yawned a good three inches.

"A P-rifle!" the girl gasped. "Where'd you get that, Lincoln?"

The youngster sneered at her unparliamentary behavior. He placed the rifle on the table with a hollow clatter.

"It's our arsenal," he said proudly.

"But we're not *supposed* to have any P-rifles," the new President said nervously. "I mean, if the Council ever found out—"

"My Dad gave it to me," said Lincoln stiffly. "A long time ago. He gave it to *me*," he repeated, looking at the open-mouthed faces around him.

"Yes, but all P-rifles and P-guns have to be turned over to the Council. It's the *Law*!"

"But it's mine!" the boy said

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almost tearfully. "My Dad said so. He gave it to me for Christmas."

"How could you remember that?" the girl jeered. "You musta been *two* years old then. How could you remember?"

"I *do*!"

"We *gotta* have an arsenal," the Vice-President interrupted. "After all, we gotta have pertection!"

"Oh, you're silly, Truman Adams. Protection from what? And besides, the Grown-Ups Law says—"

"It's *not* the Grown-Ups Law!" the seven-year-old cried. "They never made that law. It was the Council. *They* made it, on account of they wanted all the Toys for themselves! That's why—and I'm *not* silly."

There was a shocked reaction to his seditious outburst, even in that stimulating atmosphere of delicious rebellion. The new members of the Top Secret Club looked at each other uneasily. After all, the Council *was* the Council. The Grown-Ups Law left no doubt on that score.

"Well," said the girl, "you're just lucky, Lincoln Wilson, that's all I can say. It's a good thing for you that I don't get my Council seat until next year, or else I'd turn you right in."

"Snitchtattle!" said Truman under his breath.

The girl picked up the plastic weapon and examined it. Her Parents had never given *her* a P-gun, even though she secretly craved one. Boys, she thought disgustedly. They have *all* the fun . . .

"All right," she said, rapping the gavel. "Let's get on with the meeting!"

THE TALK was already under way when Costa entered the map-lined room. There was an excited buzz of conversation and as he limped to the center table the bent backs of the General Staff hovering over an outspread diagram recalled to mind the terrible days he was now trying so desperately to forget.

Some of the officers, the younger ones especially, nodded to him with stiff formality as he joined the conference. But Spey, the Lieutenant Colonel who had once served under him at the Allegheny front, greeted him warmly.

"It's good to see you, General," he said, gripping his hand. "Like old times, eh?"

"Yes," said Costa tersely. "What is going on?"

"I'll pull this thing together," said the colonel. "We'll take it from the beginning—for your benefit."

The colonel called the meeting to order again, and the staff officers took their seats. Costa chose a seat at his old friend's side, wisely allowing him to conduct the proceedings. He did not speak until the colonel handed him a copy of the Intelligence report which had inspired the reunion.

"Look this over, General," Spey said, smiling. "It seems there's an-

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other battleground we have to take."

Costa stared incredulously at the document. It bore the title: X ISLAND.

"What is this?" he asked, gazing at the first page in bewilderment.

"I can save you some time," said the colonel smoothly. "The report concerns a Pacific Island discovered by one of our pilots last month. It appears to be a rather unusual stronghold."

There was a murmer of laughter around the table, and Costa relaxed, telling himself that it couldn't be anything very serious. Even the battle-hungry younger officers were taking the whole thing lightly.

"I don't understand," said Costa. "What kind of stronghold?"

He stood up, favoring his artificial leg. Someone passed the map which had excited so much interest toward him and he looked at the area which was circled in red crayon. He studied it for a while in silence, then passed it back to the center of the table.

"Ridiculous," he said. "That's the Marshall Group. We wiped it out with a germ-cloud five years ago."

The colonel laughed. "So we *thought*," he said. "Our Intelligence report tells a startlingly different story. That's why we've called this meeting—to decide what to do about it."

Costa stared at him. "You mean there are *people* on these islands?"

"Only one island," said the youthful major seated next to him. His cheeks were scrubbed pink, and there was an unpleasant glitter in his dark eyes. He would have been just a boy during the peak of the fighting . . . "The one we call X Island," the major said. "We've never noticed signs of life until now. But they're there, all right."

"Here are the old mission records, General," said Colonel Spey cheerfully. He tossed a sheaf of statistical papers in front of Costa. "You'll find the Marshall mission on top there, and you may be interested in the name of the pilot who flew it." He grinned, and the men around the table grinned back appreciatively.

Costa's face reddened. "I know who flew it," he said tersely. "And that's why I know it was completely wiped out."

"Well," said a white-mustached officer at the other end of the table, "Intelligence reports—"

"The hell with Intelligence!" said Costa. "I dropped that Cloud, and no one could have lived on afterwards!" He stopped suddenly, and settled back in the chair heavily.

"We know," said the colonel soothingly. "We're sure the mission went off as scheduled, sir. But sometimes, there are unforeseen circumstances. Things beyond a pilot's control—"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, perhaps the chemical composition of the Cloud was imperfect. That's possible, you know. Remember what happened in Egypt.

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It killed all the flies, but never touched an Egyptian."

There was a round of loud laughter.

"All right, get to the point," said Costa dully. "What do we know about this X Island?"

"Something rather peculiar," said the colonel. "It's a colony of *children*."

THE FIRST MEETING of the Top Secret Boys and Girls Club was almost drawing to a close. But Hoover Jefferson, a nine-year-old who had sat silently through the session, had a point of order.

"Are we gonna take *more* girls into the club?"

"No!" said Truman and Lincoln simultaneously.

"Well," said the president thoughtfully. "It *is* the Top Secret Boys and *Girls* Club."

"Aw, gee," said Truman plaintively. "You can't do that."

"Reason I ask is I got a sister," said Hoover timidly. "She's only five, but she's a nice kid. I mean, she ain't any trouble or anything."

"That little snotnose?" said Truman. "She'd only make trouble for us."

"Shut up!" said Betsy. "She's no more a snotnose than you are."

"She can hardly talk," said the vice-president. "She was just a baby when the Grown-Ups went away."

"Well," said Hoover convincingly, "then she won't be able to give away our secrets."

"That's true," said Betsy. "It's okay with me, Hoover. If you want to, that is."

"Gee, thanks!" said Hoover Jefferson.

"Wait a minute!" said Truman heatedly. "You can't do that! You gotta put it to a vote!"

"Yeah," said the young Secretary of War. "Put it to a vote!"

"Oh, all right," said Betsy, annoyed by this encroachment of red tape. She rapped the stone. "All those in favor of letting Hoover's kid sister into the club, say Ay."

"*Ay*!" she shouted, along with three other small voices.

"All those opposed?"

"*Nay*!" shouted Truman Adams, Lincoln Wilson, and two other members.

"Tie," said Betsy, "so the president's vote carries it. Hoover, you can bring your sister to the next meeting."

"Wait a minute!" Truman cried. "That isn't fair!"

"Truman, look!"

Lincoln Wilson pointed to the doorway of the clubhouse in horror. There was a boy of thirteen standing there, frowning at them. He was dressed in the same shabby garb as the rest of the children, but there was a P-gun strapped to his waist by a plastic belt, and he wore the unmistakable look of authority.

"A Council member!" said little Hoover, in a frightened voice.

COSTA LOOKED at the colonel unbelievingly. "Are you serious?" he said. "War on children?"

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"That's too harsh, General," his old comrade-in-arms replied. "Technically, these children are still the enemy, even if their parents are dead."

"It's insanity," said Costa, putting his fingers to his forehead. "We can't do such a thing."

"I hate to remind you of this, General," said the colonel carefully. "But you and I were not averse to killing children during the war. Do you suppose they were spared in the action? They were not," he said sadly. "And now, because a handful of children have survived, God knows how—"

"Perhaps the Cloud killed only the parents. There may have been some error in the manufacture—"

"More likely they were saved by the older folks," said the colonel. "Somehow. But what's the difference? The point is we must make some disposition of them. Isn't that only sensible?"

"It's as if they were meant to be spared," mused Costa. "A directive from Heaven."

"Come, now!"

"A sentimental notion, eh, Colonel?" Costa grinned wryly. "Perhaps you will report me to the Capitol as too senile for the New Society? Just as you once reported me as too rash and immature."

"I never did that!" said the colonel indignantly. "You know the criticism did not come from me, General!"

"Yes, of course," said Costa. "You really must forgive my cantankerousness, Colonel. It should be permitted in a man of my years. And then there is my leg, you see." He patted the metal structure inside his pants leg. "The one I left behind in Colorado remembers me sometimes. Every now and then it kicks and twitches, and I feel the pain." He smiled at the colonel without humor.

"I understand that," said Spey. "But the problem still exists. Now, we have reached some sort of rough agreement—"

"Without me?" said Costa.

"We knew you would see the logic of our strategy, General. It's really very simple. One plane—one cloud."

"That would be murder, Colonel. The war is over."

"Not officially, General. And we would be delaying the official termination by allowing X Island to become a threat."

"A threat?"

"Children grow up. That is unfortunately a habit with them. And if their parents inspired them with any patriotic fervor, well—there isn't any other *good* solution. We don't take prisoners, remember."

"But they're children *now*!" Costa exploded. "They can still be integrated."

"I doubt that, General. Our decision must be accepted."

Costa stood up. "I shall accept no such decision until it proceeds from the Higher Command itself."

Colonel Spey sighed with relief. "Then it's all right," he said. "We

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have word from the Capitol. They see it *our* way, General."

Costa sat down again. He touched his head, rubbing the tips of his fingers through the bristly white hair.

"Very well," he said, without looking up. "But as Commander of the Occupation Emergency forces, I still reserve the right to choose the pilot."

"Of course!" said the colonel.

"I choose myself," said Costa.

THE COUNCIL of Elders had several things in common. They were all thirteen years old, except one boy who had just turned fourteen. They were all boys, since no girls on the Island had yet reached Council age. And they were all dedicated to the Laws left behind for them by the Grown-Ups, who had given them the Laws and this government on that terrifying day when they had manned the long boats, with great weeping and wailing, and sailed away into nowhere.

They sat with imposing sternness behind the Council table in the Government House, and the prisoners who faced them trembled at their wrath.

"The charge," said the oldest boy, Chairman of the Council, Ben Washington.

"Prisoners are charged with forming a secret society," said the boy appointed bailiff. "Betsy Coolidge, Lincoln Wilson, Truman Adams . . ." He called off each name, and the ex-members of the Top Secret Boys and Girls Club bowed their heads.

"Who will speak in defense?" said the chairman.

"Prisoners have elected Betsy Coolidge."

"Step forward, Betsy."

Timidly, Betsy said: "It was just a game, Mr. Chairman. Honest! I found them playing in an old abandoned shack, and Truman here, he said they were having a 'nitiation."

Angrily, Truman protested: "That's a lie. You wanted to be President! You said if we didn't make you President you would snitch to the Council."

"All right, Truman," Betsy said. "Don't get so excited."

"But it was all a game, Mr. Chairman," Truman insisted. "I—I mean, we weren't gonna make it a regular *club* or anything. I mean, the Grown-Ups Law *says*—

Another member said: "Prisoners had a P-rifle in their shack, Mr. Chairman."

The boy with the weapon exclaimed angrily: "It's *my* P-rifle! My Dad gave it to me!

A fourth boy said accusingly: "You *know* that all P-weapons are to be turned over to the Council, Lincoln."

"Oh, yeah? Where does it say that in the Laws? *You* made that up, Benjamin Washington! You don't want *nobody* to have any fun!"

Pandemonium!

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And then they heard the plane flying high overhead.

COSTA STEPPED out of the single-seater jet, took off his cap and brushed away the galloping beads of sweat that were trickling into his eyes. Landing the small plane on unfamiliar terrain was a nerve-wracking enough task to produce an outpouring of nervous perspiration. But landing with a cloud of death in the underbelly of the jet made it a whole lot worse.

He narrowed his eyes against the bright tropical sun, and stared in consternation at the ragged group of children coming towards him at a dead run. The tallest of them couldn't have been more than shoulder high to him, and most of them looked like the countless urchins who had roved the streets of the capital in the grim period immediately following the victory. Five, six, seven, eight year olds they were with wild unkempt hair and sun-browned limbs, each hooting and hollering at the sight of him like an abbreviated Indian.

They quickly surrounded him, the youngest of them gawking foolishly up at his uniform and then at his tiny jet. But the older ones —the lean-faced, firm-jawed boys with the funny toy guns strapped to their waists—looked him over with a coldly calculating hostility.

They were a wild and savage bunch, beyond a doubt. But they were children for all that, and Costa was glad he had chosen to leave the Cloud in the safe confines of the plane.

"Hello!" he said in greeting. "My name is Costa. Who's the leader here?"

A dark-haired boy, taller and more tight-lipped than the rest, stepped quickly forward, his hand on the red-plastic holster at his hip.

"Who are *you*?" he demanded. "How did you get here?"

"Isn't it obvious?' said the general gently. "By plane. I'm here to make a Treaty with you." He extended his hand, in the universal gesture of friendship.

"You're an Enemy," the boy said. "We don't make treaties."

"Come now," said Costa. "The war is over. We could live in peace together, if we tried." He looked at the smaller boys. "Where are your parents?" he asked.

"Away," the bigger boy replied for all of his companions. "They took sick—so they had to go away."

"Where to?"

The boy jerked his head towards the open sea. "Out there. They took all the boats, and they told us not to be afraid."

"I can see you're not," said Costa softly. "But how do you live?"

The boy stiffened. "By the food in the forest and the Laws of the Government," he said. He reached down and unhooked the clumsy holster. Steadily he brought the red gun to bear on Costa's chest. "Now you come with us," he said. "You are our prisoner."

"Wait a while," Costa protested,

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laughing. "I'm here under a flag of truce. I came alone, you see—unarmed. Surely you'll grant me the rights of diplomatic immunity."

"I don't know what that means," the boy said simply. "But we know you're an Enemy. And the Grown-Ups Law tells us what to do."

"Now, see here!" Costa took a hesitant step forward. "I came to talk peace. You're in danger, understand? Your whole island is in deadly danger. If we wanted to we could drop another Cloud and kill you all. Just like that!" He snapped his fingers. "But the war's over. We can be friends—"

"Come on," said the boy, prodding him with the gun.

Costa stood there, puzzled. It was natural of them to be suspicious, of course. But what would be the wisest course to pursue to convince them of his good intentions?

He shrugged, and followed the dark-haired boy.

He was escorted into a nearby hut—a crude palm-thatched building badly in need of repairs. The door had long since rotted off its hinges, and the two young guards who had been stationed outside constituted a barrier he could have thrust aside without much effort.

But he decided to wait. The children were frightened, hostile—very definitely afraid of him and what he represented. But he was sure that their so-called Grown-Ups Law could hardly have more than a ritualistic significance to them now. After all, five years had passed since the day of the Cloud; five years since all adult Authority had left the island to die bravely at sea.

His throat tightened as he visually recalled to memory what that day had been like. The children, mercifully spared from the cloud-carried infection by some miracle . . . the parents, tragically stricken by its fatal touch. In his mind's gaze he saw them pulling oar away from the island to a private, watery burial ground—away from the frightened eyes of their young. Costa shivered in the cool darkness of his makeshift prison.

Absently his hand went to his boot and felt the thin swelling of the cylinder hidden there. He had not told the truth about being unarmed. The day was long past when he would have hesitated at a useful lie. He had a weapon, of course—and he could easily take command if these strange children became troublesome. But he would use reason first, reinforced by cunning, perhaps. There were only children, after all . . .

The children brought him some food, and it was surprisingly good—melons, and breadfruit, and even an odd kind of tasty meat. He ate greedily, then stretched out on the dirt floor and dozed.

He was awakened too soon to have his familiar nightmare of the descending Cloud again.

"Prisoner will rise!" a boyish voice said.

He opened his eyes, and saw the

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dark-haired lad standing in the doorway.

"Get up," said the boy curtly. "We're taking you to trial."

Costa rose and brushed himself off. "Trial?" he said smiling. "On what charges?"

"Espionage," said the boy. He gestured behind him, and two other lads, carrying long plastic rifles with bores wide enough to admit a ping-pong ball, stepped quickly forward.

"This way," said the dark-haired boy.

They marched him between a double row of children. He grinned and waved at the curious assemblage of spectators who watched him pass with wide-eyed interest. Their destination was a somewhat more solid building at the far end of the street which bore a faded but neatly-lettered sign that declared the structure to be the Government House.

His stern-faced escorts led him inside, and he was amused by the equally grave countenances of the youths who sat in judgment behind the scarred wooden table.

The "trial" was brief. There were a dozen ragged witnesses ready to testify to his unauthorized descent on the Island, and the evidence against him was further strengthened by his free admission that his departure point had been Enemy headquarters. Upon questioning, he told them he was the Commanding General of the Occupation Emergency Forces, but that his intention in coming to their Island was to offer the branch of peace.

"We are civilized, you know," he told them dryly. "Your parents may have told you frightening tales about us. But I can assure you that we are not really as bad as we have been painted. We have suffered in this war, too, and now our only desire is to establish a lasting peace."

"Why should we believe you?" asked one of the Council elders.

"Very well," said Costa, his voice now tinged with exasperation. "Don't believe me then. Only believe this. If we fail to work out some understanding another plane will come to this Island, and it won't take the trouble to land!"

There was a hasty, whispered conference at the table. Then the chairman spoke. "The Grown-Ups Law has told us what do," he said. "We declare that you are an Enemy Spy."

Costa didn't know whether to be angry or amused.

"The sentence is the firing squad," said the boy.

They took him behind the building, and Costa almost decided that the farce had gone far enough. Firing squad, indeed! With some concern he examined the plastic rifles the boys were carrying. Surely they were nothing but toys! But what if they had *real* guns hidden away somewhere, in a secret arsenal?

The silly children had searched him only superficially. He felt com-

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forted by the presence of the cylinder in his boot, and wondered if he would have to use it.

"The prisoner will stand against the wall," said the Council Chairman. "Do you wish to be blindfolded?"

Costa was suddenly worried. "That's enough!" he cried. He snatched a rifle from the arms of a startled youngster. "Stand back," he warned, pointing the ridiculous weapon at the chairman.

The older boy looked at him with contempt. "Don't be a dope," he said. "P-guns don't really *hurt* anybody."

Costa looked down at the red plastic rifle. He pointed it at the ground, and pulled the trigger. The thing buzzed foolishly, but nothing happened. It was a toy, all right. He felt like a hundred kinds of fool for taking it so seriously. He lowered the rifle and grinned.

"Okay," he said. He returned the weapon to its owner and stepped over to the wall.

"No blindfold," he said cheerfully. "Fire away!"

The squad lifted their plastic rifles. On the command, they pulled the trigger. The guns buzzed, but that was all—except, of course, that a small boy of no more than six cried out: "Bang! You're dead!"

They took him back to his plane, and Costa twisted his lips in a puzzled smile.

"I don't get it," he told them. "That was a peculiar sentence."

"We follow the Laws," said the oldest boys. "The Grown-Ups knew what was best."

"Well, they're bloodless laws, anyway," said the general. "The Grown-Ups must have been pretty nice people."

Costa climbed into his plane. "I'll do what I can for you, kids," he said. "But I can't promise too much. The Higher Command gets pretty stuffy about their directives, but I have a few friends on top who may see things my way."

"We don't want any favors," the tall boy said.

"This is no favor," said the general. "This is something I want to do for myself."

He waved them back from the ship, and zoomed off. They watched his departure with empty stares . . .

Costa reached the site of the Capitol in less than eight hours. His muscles ached and his head throbbed with the arguments, desperate and urgent, of the appeal he was about to make. Would they understand him? Would they share his sympathy with a few hundred unfortunate children? Or would they not think twice of declaring them an Enemy menace, and writing their ticket to oblivion? Would utter ruthlessness be their guide?

A sudden rage filled Costa's chest, and was pumped outwards by his heart into his arms, his legs, his throat, his brain. Peace! Peace! Would they never declare it? Would they never give the word to end the hatred and begin the love?

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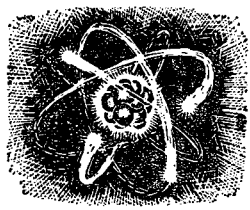
Would they keep their terrible war everlastingly alive? Did the silence of the guns and the crowded graveyards mean nothing to them? What new plot was this—what aspect of the master plan? Eternal war, unending aggression, arms for the sake of arms? Why was peace still mocked and derided? *Why?*

A red mist clouded Costa's vision, and his body quivered as if struck by bullets. He screamed aloud, and reached across his lap for the lever. Silently, softly, the fleecy white Cloud settled down over the Capitol with dream-like motion. But this time, it was no dream.



An exciting sequel to NIGHTMARE TOWER *and* THE WHITE RAIN CAME *links the newest, amazing adventures of the irrepressible Fenlay twins to a strange new birth on Mars*

SNOWSTORM ON MARS

By JACQUES JEAN FERRAT

A motor accident on a planet too like Earth for comfort and death wishes that can't be controlled walk arm and arm with a mystery within an enigma

DEATH WISH

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

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satan on holiday

by . . . Ralph Bennitt

College football triumphs and a high scholastic record may not always go arm in arm. But when Lucifer takes a hand—Brother!

NICK'S VACATION was due but he felt embittered and frustrated as he zoomed high above the broken wastes of Chaos and then down toward the gates of Hell. For a full day on Earth he hadn't latched on to a single sinner, and his reddish-brown eyes glowed with rage as he studied the broad road far below him.

Sin and Death had built that once-smooth primrose path. And, on departing forever from Hell, they had left the threefold triple gates of adamantine, iron and brass wide open. To Nick's X-ray eyes the road looked raveled. Many culverts had fallen in and the primroses had died long ago.

Bad news travels fast, and poor transportation was not the only reason men and women of today laughed at Nick's smooth proposals. Being honest with himself, he was forced to face the truth in all of its naked ugliness. Hell was outmoded. He and his "ancient, trusty, drouthy cronies" had been outsmarted and outstripped by a world moving too fast for archaic ideas to take root and flourish.

The Faustian legend has a Satanic way of recurring in the collected works of world-famous writers, and who are we to deny to Ralph Bennitt his right to a possible future seat on that roller coaster to fame? If the Devil often seems to create a hell on Earth for the unwary, there are chuckles enough here to compensate for many a torture-emblazoned Monday. We give you then his Satanic Majesty, in a fantasy escapade that would make headlines in Hades!

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Not only must he now contend with the scorn of future candidates. Shades, once blissfully content to play with fire and shoot brimstone marbles, had been bribing Charon to ferry them back across the River Styx.

They sneaked past sleepy old Cerberus by tossing the three-headed watch dog three chunks of phantom steak. With the gates always open, the ungrateful malcontents flitted back to earth where they could play around insolently as many lifetimes as they pleased.

Had they boosted old Hades? Ha! The true stories they'd been telling made Nick's horns curl. *All right,* he decided, *I'll let the truth help me. I'll fix up my place like Upstairs—better than Hell on earth even.*

He'd tried locking the doors but the subterfuge had been far from a real solution. For a month now the gates had opened only for him at his password. The central idea of circumventing The Big Boss Upstairs hadn't been advanced much. Nick never stopped working on it, but he knew that a devil might as well be bailing out the Aegean Sea with a thimble. The basic futility of it began sprouting a terrific idea inside Nick's horned head, born of the fact he'd be starting his sabbatical leave tomorrow.

With the gates in sight, a mere million miles away at that precise second of time, he gave a shrill whistle. A fairly recent gimmick with Nick, it outshrieked all whistles. Following Doppler's Law, it probably sounded to a couple of souls plodding along far below like the Wabash Railroad's Banner Blue screaming through Saunemin, Illinois.

Oddly, these high-frequency waves were remarkably effective in the non-existent air of Chaos. They energized an electronic device he had shamelessly swiped from a couple of struggling engineer students at Midwestern University. "The Dingus," as Nick called it, operated gears and opened the ponderous gates, and also awoke Cerberus from his slumbers.

More important, the whistle would cause the angel Rafael to draw his flaming sword—if he happened to be hanging around with another message from The Big Boss Upstairs. The flash gave warning of his presence, and Nick would flit onward. He'd sneak home by his own private entrance, a tunnel at the lower end of the burning lake where no soul ever wandered.

As usual, Nick was traveling in fourth dimension with the speed of light. If pressed for time, or when he was being chased by a squad of seraphs, he could go into the high gear of fifth dimension and zip along with the speed of thought. "Click-Click" transportation, he called it. However, a second speed of 186,000 mps served well enough for the ordinary de-

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mands of his job. First speed, a relatively slow supersonic velocity, he could achieve with his great red wings.

Today he had rounded the earth umpteen times with frequent stops in bars, bedrooms and back alleys. Unfortunately, since it was a Sunday in mid-September, he had found few likely customers in his favorite haunts, and was returning empty handed, so to speak. Not a single name, address, and previous condition of servitude had he been able to jot down on his photographic brain.

Seeing only Cerberus at the gate, Nick decelerated, unflapped his great wings, and landed neatly. He needed the wings no more than he did the horns or his spear-headed tail with its deadly stinger —attributes of his three-dimensional existence.

In the third dimension he had snagged many a wavering soul by pretending to be a five-percenter from Washington. He had discarded the cloven hoofs in 55 A.S. (After Salem), but the boys in his court expected their potent monarch to use the other ancient symbols. Moreover, newcomers to Hades would have been downright disappointed if the well advertised relics of olden times proved to be only a myth.

After making sure that Rafael, head legman of The Big Boss Upstairs, wasn't around, Nick snarled in relief. The job had its points, but on the days when he failed to make a single deal one of Rafe's warnings for a minor infraction of the law could be exceedingly irritating. It made Hell's sovereign feel like a small-town mayor getting a ticket for parking by a fire plug.

"The BBU," he growled as he kicked his equally growling watch dog, "must have remembered I begin my sabbatical tomorrow. He's easing up or else has sent Rafe scouting some other place."

The vacation was due all right, and Nick meant to set his year off to good advantage. For seven eons he had been faithfully discharging his duties of tempting souls. It had been strictly The BBU's idea, apparently because man, being a free agent, was supposed to be free to choose for himself. If he resisted Satan's wiles he could requisition a harp or a set of gold golf clubs.

The fearsome Cerberus let out a three-tone howl and tried to bite his great grandsire on both legs. But Nick quickly changed into his old phantom self, and poor Cerb nabbed nothing. An ancient custom, it put Nick in better spirits. He chuckled as he trotted into the tunnel and down the slope to the near shore of the steamy River Styx.

Charon gave his boss a toothless grin. "How come you're so late today, Your Majesty?" he asked. The old riverman wasn't very bright but he'd stuck doggedly to his special job of ferrying passen-

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gers over the earth-hell boundary for more millennia than Nick cared to remember.

"Things went slow because it's Sunday on Earth," he snapped, glaring irately at poor Charon.

Ordinarily, he liked to have his old-timers inquire about his doings. But just at that moment he was thinking of a Midwestern U student called "Pudzy" for Jacob Michael Przmdzy. Nick had spotted the lad as a substitute who might be persuaded to run things for a year without letting the organization go completely democratic—or even Republican.

Using a leaky old skiff to get to his own domain always irked Hades' big shot. It put him in the class of ordinary devils and shades, but unfortunately it was the LAW. Once, to annoy The BBU, he had tried to cross by Click-Click translation and had fallen into the boiling water. Styx River water boils at 3000°F, so it had taken him a week—roughly a year on Earth—to get unboiled in Hell's Antarctic. The organization had gone to pot meanwhile, with Beelzebub, Moloch, Belial, Mulciber, and other old charter members trying to run the corporation's affairs.

Circe climbed aboard with a cheerful, "Hi, pal!" while her laughing sister mer-devils swam voluptuously around the little craft. She coyly parted the long golden hair hanging well below her middle—Hell's own strip-tease act—and begged for the customary kiss.

Nick spatted her wet bareness where all sirens should be spatted. "Beat it, Cirs, I'm busy," he said. And when she tried to crawl onto his lap, he added: "Go on, or I'll send you and your girl friends back to the Isles of Greece for one to five." He roared in Satanic laughter when Circe dived overboard screaming in rage.

No doubt figuring the big shot was his old sunny self, Charon asked for a raise in salary. "The customers," he complained, "don't bring the penny tolls like they used to. But I still have to carry 'em."

"I boosted you to two drachmas a day," Nick returned cagily, as always. "It was during the war. You have a devilishly bad memory."

"The last Pelopennesian War," Charon said with amazing accuracy for an old fellow approaching senility. "Are you thinking of World War One, Two or Three —plus, Boss?"

"Okay," Nick said, for he needed his dependable old-timers for strategic positions. "I'll raise you to ten rubles a day, and give you a year's vacation in Moscow. You'll be on a company swindle sheet too, if you'll stir up trouble. Requisition a sack of gold from Mammon, and I'll okay it."

"Where is this musk cow?" Charon asked plaintively. "I've seen a lot of punks from there but can't understand their lingo. They

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must have chunks of ice in their mouths."

"Worse than that. Sit tight till you get travel orders. 'Bye, now," Nick said. He stepped onto the brimstone beach, leaving Charon wondering what would become of his job. He couldn't know that Nick was planning a bridge across the Styx in his rapidly maturing plan of a hot, new, fair deal for all concerned.

II

AFTER A tasty dinner, with a beaker of vitriol in his fist for a liqueur, Nick roared for Azazel, Flag Bearer and Statistician-Chief, to call the Council. He then strolled toward the throne room.

Little Cletus, once a gamin in ancient Thebes, appeared from nowhere. His cherubic face and curly black hair made him look like Time on January Second, but he was the smartest and orneriest little imp between the blue sky and the burning lake. Once, he had even penetrated Nick's mind-shield and learned the trick of Click-Clicking.

Thus equipped, he had become Nick's best scout for snooping around and listening to angelic gossip. "I heard Rafe and Mike shooting the breeze today, Clootie," he said.

Nick frowned at the Scots' word which connoted the cloven hoofs he had ceased to affect. But gossip between The BBU's head seraphs could be important, so he withheld his punishing hand.

"Well, spill it, Cleet," Nick said. "I'm on my way to a conference."

"Trick or treat. I want a bonus for this dope."

"Anything reasonable, you conniving little brat. Your regular pay and, say, an electric train. And hurry up with the info."

"I heard those two jaspers talking about a new world The Big Fellow starts building tomorrow. True or not, it's what they said."

Nick swallowed his excitement. If The BBU created a new world He quite possibly meant to wipe out the old one and populate it with a new race—maybe of just dogs and horses. For that, Nick could not blame Him. But what would become of Hell?

"Where is this new world?" he asked. "Did they say?"

"I dunno what direction, but it's four-five umtrillion light years from The BBU's home base. Mike, the private-eye, had cased the spot and he said Earth's sun isn't a pinpoint from there even to his telescopic vision."

"Excellent, kid." Nick felt doubly pleased. The BBU never changed a plan, and this new project would keep Him busy for a while. "I'll bring you the electric train when—"

"Nuts! I want a ray gun better'n Earth kids use. I'm gonna blast Cerberus clean out of Hell. He bit me in three places this eve-

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ning. Me, on official business! You gotta do something about that."

"I'll think about it. Go play with Circe's kids."

"Those sissies!" Cletus screamed, and clicked out of sight.

In the throne room, quiet old Beelzebub sat at Nick's right, while snaggle-toothed Moloch slouched over to his customary seat on the left. The rest of the Board straggled in: Belial, Mammon, Mulciber, others—all charter members. Beautiful Astarte, the Phoenician Queen of Heaven, stopped flirting with handsome Belial and arranged her stenographer's equipment.

After Azazel planted Satan's black and white flag of bones and blood, and they had repeated the usual ritual vow of getting back to Heaven, the Inner Council got down to business. Silence fell like a black cloud after Nick revealed part of his plan. Azazel smoothed his sleek black hair; Moloch went on picking his teeth; wily Belial covertly studied his companions as he cleaned his long fingernails.

Beelzebub raised his gray head. "Who'll take your place while you're gone, Your Majesty? Don't look at me. I'd be glad to act as adviser, but I'm too fat and lazy to get around like I used to."

"A good lie, Beel." Nick patted his lieutenant's heavy shoulder. Beel and old Mulciber were the steady sort, balance wheels amid wranglers, but not mean enough. "How about you, Molly?"

For all his false grin, Moloch would take on any dirty job. But he said, "Skip me, Nick," in his husky voice. "My bloody work keeps me plenty busy."

"No ambish, eh?" Nick sneered.

Beelzebub chuckled. "We all lost that the day The BBU kicked us out. Boy, did we land on our faces! I still taste the burning lake we fell into."

Nick resisted a shudder, for no successful boss can indulge in such weakness. "Okay, then," he said after a look around. "Don't you old frauds beef about the guy who'll pinch-hit for me. He went through a Chicago high school and finished the first year in electronics at Midwestern University. He has to quit because his folks haven't the dough to put him through."

"My-hell," Belial breathed. "A teenager!"

Even Moloch looked horrified. "Why can't he wangle an athletic scholarship? He plays football, don't he?"

"Doesn't," Nick barked. "Mind your language, Molly. This lad can't play football because he has a club foot. He's raw-boned and he's tough from being frustrated all his life. I've had my eye on him for a year. I told him I knew a doc who could fix his foot without charge—me, of course. My blandishments didn't faze him. He said our amusements are corny."

"A Sunday School laddie, huh?" prim Azazel sniffed.

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"He went only once and because his old man beat the whey out of him. The boy has a lot above the ears, so I know he can handle my job. I think I can land him."

"What's his name?" Old Beel asked.

Nick's red face reddened a little more. "His name—and if one of you ancient mariners laughs I'll banish him to ten years at Palm Springs—is Jacob Michael Przmdzy. Pronounced Pudzy."

No one laughed, though Belial, the court wag, stooped to tie his sandal strings. "Hell, Boss," he protested, "Pudzy belongs with the Fightin' Irish. Fix him up and he'll make All-American half."

"I'll fix 'im." Nick swelled out his chest. "The new All-American half who'll sail across the football sky is yours not-truly. A year from now Jake Pudzy can carry on at Midwestern with the credit hours I earn in his name. The profs will love him, and he'll come back here eventually. I'll promise him a job in a supervisory capacity—probably straw-boss over a squad of clinker pickers, but he needn't know details. Meanwhile, as a college boy I expect to latch on to new ideas."

"What's so good about Midwestern, Boss?" Azazel asked.

"Holy smoke, Azzy, you ought to get out oftener. Midwestern started panty raids."

"Ha!" came from grizzled old Mulciber, the engineer. As Chief of Industry, he had built the original palace and all the present improvements besides heading up mine and factory production. His horse face twisted in a sly grin. "Good timber there, eh, Boss?"

"Sure, but that's only part of my plan." Nick paused, then went on lying gaily. "I've been studying a hot deal ever since men quit killing one another in Korea. I'm going to reverse our policy."

"How?" Beelzebub asked after scanning the fear-wrinkled faces.

"For one thing, I'm going to modernize this dump: Cocktail bars, roadhouses, race tracks, casinos—run crooked, of course—golf courses with free lunch and drinks at the nineteenth hole, hot and *cold* showers, faster transportation, free space travel for the kids. One specialty will be automatic cutouts of TV commercials. After that, I'll let every sinful ugly son in the place go and come as he pleases. How would you like that?"

"Wow!" Belial yelled. As Propaganda Chief he designed all of Hell's plots with a staff of former advertising geniuses. "I see the chief's game to beat The BBU. Instead of grabbing lost souls in dribs of a thousand a day, we'll scatter the ones we have all over the earth. Not cheeky new bugs but charter members and the few billion who've qualified. They'll advertise the joint right, see? The dupes will flock in by the millions when they hear about it."

"We're already crowded with

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stinkers," grouchy Moloch complained. "The housing shortage—"

"Is whipped," Mulciber cut in confidently. "Our new development on the River Lethe is finished. It will hold a hundred million."

"And," Belial added eagerly, "Grade-A Regulars will leave their bungalows for a while, at least till they're fed up with taxes and come skidding back."

"Azzy, what is the latest census?" Beelzebub asked.

Azazel focussed his telescopic eyes on a roll of incombustible micro-film and cleared his throat. Except for Nick he was the most feared devil because his records gave the true history of every shade in Hades. He delighted in showing up any poor devil who'd bragged about the number of mistresses he had once kept.

"For those who came late, this little record I've kept since the day The BBU kicked us downstairs, which, you will recall, happened eighteen million years ago—"

"Skip the commercial, you old bore!" Moloch roared.

"Very well. To answer the gentleman's polite question, Molly, we now have four hundred sixty-two billion, eight hundred mill—"

"Never mind details," Moloch snorted, and looked at Mammon, Corporation Treasurer. "Pretty big payroll, ain't it, Mammy?"

"Only a half billion dollars per diem," replied Hell's financial wizard. "Since all new bugs must work out their passage charge of ten thousand drachmas; also, since our commissariat nets a hundred percent profit, and with our diamond, ruby, uranium, and gold mines producing billions every day, we aren't in the red."

"Egad." Moloch frowned. "Where are you puttin' all the gold? There must be billions of the stuff on hand somewhere."

Mammon flushed, and Nick sprang to his support. "That's a mere detail, Molly, but I'll tell you. We've stopped burying it, same as Fort Knox will soon, and we're stockpiling near main roads. It's safe. Nobody here needs gold except when he goes out on company business. But I can use all of it. Explain in a minute."

Nick turned to Mulciber. "Mulcie, before you give your report, I want to tell you of a special project. Throw a ten-lane bridge across the Styx. Also, put some gangs to repairing the road Sin and Death built for us."

"That last ought to be easy, Mulcie," Belial chortled. "You have a big stock of paving material to draw on."

Ignoring the corny joke, Mulciber turned to Satan, and gave his report. With a backlog of steel orders piling up, and with forty new blast furnaces finished on the River Acheron, he needed to mine more tin, vanadium, nickel and copper. He had a plentiful supply

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of construction supers but wanted more department heads in the Mines Department. "And I need more hands for common labor," he finished.

"Where you gonna get 'em?" Moloch snorted, "if we let the punks wander around outside instead of bending their backs?"

"I'm playing a long game," Nick answered suavely. "That's why I'm going to college. Certainly, we'll get more workers, as union boss slickers call 'em."

Even Beelzebub looked puzzled. "How?"

"After I come back we'll flood the earth with diamonds, rubies, gold and uranium. Nothing will have any value and everybody will start fighting, even the Russians. We sit on the sidelines and watch two and a-half billion dupes bomb one another to hell. A few will head for St. Pete's pearly gates, but we'll nab most. You can be sure of that."

Belial whistled. "There'll be no one left to breed."

"Exactly!" Nick roared. "It'll bring The BBU to time before he can launch a lightning bolt."

"Gosh, Boss," put in the frightened Azazel, "The BBU will never let you finish a year at this college. You'll stand out, and Rafe and Mike and their scouts will spot you. The Big Fellow will boot you clean back to Hell, and lock the gates but good."

"Izzat so?" Nick beckoned the others to come nearer. "Cletus just gave me some interesting dope," he whispered. "Tomorrow, The BBU starts building a new world in some far corner of this fantastic universe. That takes seven days. While He's busy several trillion light years away, I become Pudzy. Don't forget his spirit will carry on my job here and there."

"He may look like you but he'll never act it," Belial warned.

"Close enough," Nick said, pleased at the sly compliment. "I'll give him instructions, and you boys follow his orders. Don't bother me unless something really important comes up."

III

ILLINOIS had the ball on Midwestern's two-yard line and only four minutes before the end of the crucial game. The scoreboard showed: "Ilinois 13—Midwestern 0." This year even Iowa had beaten Midwestern, and the Illini were taking it easy. They needed only a win to beat out Michigan for the Conference Championship and the Rose Bowl. Saddened MW rooters emptied their flasks.

"Pudzy!" Coach Heeney bawled. (Nick had put it in his mind.)

In carrying out his hellish plan, Nick had been forced to live through the two nerve-wracking months of frustration. Practicing football only as a scrub, he had gone about as an ordinary student —except for his straight A's. Like the true Pudzy, he was a well-

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built and fairly good-looking blond lad.

As such he had discovered what makes men tick, what causes them to be heroes one day and fools the next. In essence, he concluded, you have to be a good sport, tell the truth—when convenient, anyway—and be regular.

Women, he'd learned, weren't so different from men, and with the French he applauded, *'Vive la difference!'* Still, being a dummy for the Varsity to kick around had not been an easy task, and Nick's fingernails showed signs of wear.

He flung down his blanket, trotted onto the field and said to the man in the striped T-shirt, "Jake Pudzy replacing Ardon."

Captain Bollinger, MW fullback, swallowed his last disappointment. Tradition, however, made him clap the obscure scrub player on the shoulder and give the old MW rallying cry: "Moo! Now go in at right half and help us win, Pudzy."

"You're in for a surprise, Bolly." Nick took his place wondering if Circe and her sister coeds were in the stands, and laughed inwardly as he heard the Illini quarterback give the next play—Rocky McClean through his own left tackle.

Solidifying to half ton weight, Nick met the plunging Rocky at the MW goal line. What happened nobody knew for sure till the camera showed the play. Spectators saw the ball flip upward and the great Rocky lunging downward, and out. By then Nick had passed the Illini safety back and was halfway down the field. The safety man sprinted in a hopeless chase, flinging down his helmet when Pudzy made the touchdown amid roars from the MW rooters.

"Anyway, they can't brag we didn't score," Bollinger panted as he swooped down with his teammates. "Jimmy, try for the point."

"Let me convert, Bolly," Nick said. "Also, take the kick-off." He ended a mild argument by an old expression he had picked up, "What have you got to lose?"

Nick converted, and after the kick-off crashed through a team of paper men. With the goal ahead, he gleefully hurdled the safety man; made the second touchdown, then the extra point. The whistle blew with the board showing: "Illinois 13—Midwestern 14."

With the west stands in pandemonium, the Illini rooters opposite sat as if stunned. "It ain't so," one die-hard kept moaning. "He's a devil."

In the locker room, Rocky McClean said, "I hit a stone wall and passed out."

At an impromptu celebration that night, Bunny Maxwell, advertising tycoon, waddled up to the stage and adjusted his nose glasses. Since he contributed fifty grand annually to the Uni, the faculty, students and alumni listened respectfully. After praising the team

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sitting with Coach Heeney on the stage back of him, and lauding Pudzy's feats, Bunny put a grim look on his fat face.

"We gotta have a new coach," he bellowed. "Where has Heeney been not to see this remarkable sophomore talent in the scrubs? We go all season without winning a game till our brilliant head coach *happens* to think of Pudzy. I'm for hiring a new coach, and I'll contribute ten thousand hard earned dollars to a fund—"

Captain Bollinger stood up. "Coach did his best. The team is light and mostly green this year, so don't blame it all on him. You've forgotten he did win us the championship two years ago." That brought a few cheers which soon subsided.

Red of face, Coach Heeney faced the audience. "You gentlemen may as well settle it now. Don't mind me, I'm going home."

Bunny Maxwell made a wry face as the broken man stumbled off the stage. "Life is hard, folks, yet we have to face it. It takes a winning team to draw the paying customers, so I say, get a new—"

"Can it, Fatso," Nick said frostily. His six feet of muscle erect, he strode forward, not quite sure whether or not to let the wrangling go on as he would have done two months earlier. "Sit down, you false alarm. What have you ever done except to scare nitwits into buying a different toothpaste?"

Amid a shocked silence, Bunny sat. A lone drunk cheered; otherwise, the Athletic Board, alumni and students sat uneasily as the hero of the day continued in bitter tones:

"You fire Coach Heeney and you won't see me again. I have a dozen telegrams inviting me to other schools. If I accept one of these, quote, scholarships, unquote, it won't be because I need the dough. To prove it: Here's five grand toward a fund to double Coach Heeney's salary in a new five-year contract."

After seemingly reaching beneath his sports jacket, Nick tossed a heavy sack of gold pieces; a thousand of them, to the floor. A fair sample of Mammon's mint. In a whimsical mood on arriving, Nick had dutifully turned in numerous gold bricks and sacks of gold coins and dust to the Treasury Office in Washington. The unminted gold, he'd explained, came from his Idaho ranch, the coins from South America. He had accepted a million dollar credit and left every one happy.

Old Mammon had tucked a pouch of cut diamonds into Nick's pocket 'for extraordinary expenses.' He had winked as he held up one of the sacks. "This is special stuff, Your Majesty, and you'll get a kick out of it."

Bunny Maxwell puffed as he stooped to grab a gold piece which rolled toward him. "Half eagles, eh? They're illegal tender, Smarty.

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How'd you like to play on a Federal prison team four-five years?" He raised the coin as if he meant to bite it.

Nick roared with true Satanic laughter as he made a quick motion. "Better get yourself new glasses, Fatso. These are Peruvian pounds, and they passed through Customs."

Yells busted up the meeting. Fascinated news reporters made the furor nation-wide. "New Nova explodes. Unknown scrub flares across the football firmament. Pudzy, the All-American back . . ." A few hard-boiled editors of the press wondered in ink where the mysterious sophomore had come by all that gold—Peruvian, at that.

Nick didn't dodge his sudden fame nor the coeds who hung about him, but he kept his eye peeled for celestial visitors only he could see. Except for joining one of the best fraternities on the campus, the Pi Delta Omicrons, taking in an occasional PDO dance, and trying to learn what basketball was about, he kept the Pudzy nose buried in books. Even to Rafe and Mike he'd probably appear as an ordinary student but for his strange interest in study. So he hoped.

By leafing through an engineering book he could in a few minutes master every formula in it. In those first two months, he crammed through all of the text books and side reading for second year engineers. The third year course needed three weeks. The fourth year's work, even easier because the basic theories of electronics interested him, took him only a week. This brought on a new problem.

He had completed thirty months' study in about three months, leaving only nine more to wind up his sabbatical leave. With a new idea, he went one afternoon to Dean Prickett of the Engineering College. He explained in a general way what he wanted, smiling inwardly as he read the good man's bewildered thoughts.

Dean Prickett adjusted his spectacles, leaned back and stared into Pudzy's mild blue eyes, and at the corn-yellow hair of an average-looking student. "You say you want final *fourth* year examinations—after only three months of sophomore work? Really, Mr. P-P-P—"

"I'll get a hundred on any test, sir. Once you are satisfied I can answer any question correctly, I'd like to carry on the four years in civil engineering and mechanical, then go on and earn my master's and doctor's degrees in the three subjects. This work I should finish by the end of this semester."

"Oh, come now, Mister P-P-P—"

"Pudzy." Nick rattled on while the dean stared at the record card of Jacob Michael Przmdzy. "Next term I want to take on a couple of Lit courses: Philosophy, Eco-

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nomics, and, yes, Salesmanship. I'm behind on those but I can catch up while I dig into Higher Math, Advanced Electronics, Astro Physics, and Astronomy. All tie in with what life is about, you know."

"Yes, I know." The dean's hand shook as he dialed Prexy's telephone number. While waiting, he said: "I recognize you're a prodigy, Mister Pudzy. But pardon me if I explain this unparalleled request to President Bane."

"Quite all right, and thanks. I'll drop in tomorrow."

Outside on the steps of Engineering Hall, Nick grinned as he lighted his Sophomore Class pipe. By projecting himself alternately into both offices, he listened to the talk already begun.

"I don't like to deny such ambitious yearnings, President Bane, but the thing is incredible. How could a man stow away all that knowledge in a few weeks? If he has, there's something wrong with our methods of teaching the young."

"No doubt," Prexy admitted, "but go on, Dean Prickett."

The dean enlarged on Pudzy's program, ending with the old argument about maximum credit hours allowed a student. To break that sacred rule would upset the entire school.

"What's so funny?" he asked irritably when Prexy laughed.

"You're forgetting the touchdowns he can make for us next Fall. And the baskets he can heave this winter. No need drawing you a picture of what that means, so figure out something. And *treat him right*. Give him all the examinations he wants. Anything. If Pudzy can earn a dozen degrees, I'd love it. The devil himself couldn't do us more good."

"A man after my own heart," Nick muttered as the two worthies disconnected. Bane! The name had a poisonous connotation which made Nick uneasy for a moment. "He double-crosses me and I'll get him later. He could be fairly useful too."

IV

FEELING lighter hearted, Nick drew a deep breath of the cold Autumn air and hied him to the gym. The whole Uni wanted him on the basketball team, and he had finally yielded good naturedly. Once they saw him at practice work, his first plea of never having touched a basketball did no good.

With him at forward the Varsity "Whizz Cows" won every game. He merely stretched out an arm when goals had to be made. The spectators saw only an opponent's awkward fumbling, then the ball traveling like a bullet into the basket or to a teammate near it. No one ever accused Nick of fouling a man thirty feet away.

He pulled these devilish tactics only when the team needed points to win. Hogging the limelight might arouse curiosity Upstairs; a

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genuine liking for his fellow students kept him from disrupting the Whizz Cows' morale. He had a good time but it interfered with his studies. He agreed to play only in important games and if he could skip Monday to Thursday practice sessions.

Midwestern hung up the basketball championship; also, track, indoor and out. Purposely, he held down his time in the running races though cracking the 4:00 minute mile strongly tempted him. The same went for high and low hurdles and field events. He didn't want his name to spark too much newspaper talk, but once he got careless and hurled the discus into the next county.

June came, the night before Commencement. On the morrow, the faculty would hand him numerous sheepskins. Besides ordinary BS and MS degrees in each of three engineering courses, he'd get a PhD, an LLD, and a DSc. This night he was to take the reigning Campus Queen to his fraternity dance.

After a shower in the new PDO house he was smoking his pipe and pondering over his last two months' program as he dressed in his evening clothes. While fighting his white tie and cussing himself for having invented the hellish contrivance, he got a dreadful thought.

"My-hell," he breathed, "I haven't left a damned thing for young Pudzy to do next Fall." A dreadful oversight! He laid the smoldering pipe on his desk and sat down to consider how he could mend matters.

Just then, Michael and Rafael slithered through the door. They remained invisible lest one of the PDO brothers barge in to chat with the popular Pudzy. Nor did they unsheathe their flaming swords.

Nick felt the heat, however, and alarm tingled through him as with any citizen who hears a police siren uncomfortably close. He made sure his mind-shield was in place and pretended to be staring out the window. To convert now into fifth dimension and skedaddle, would be ruinous to his plan. The two could be merely checking.

The first silent words of angelic talk indicated this. "See, Rafe," Mike said. "We can forget Pudzy's newspaper rep. He's just a mortal, though an extraordinary one, perhaps more advanced than Aristarches and Leonardo da Vinci."

"Yeah, I guess so," Rafael replied. "Still, if we hadn't seen Old Nick with Charon making fools out of Bulganin and Molotov in the Kremlin a minute ago, I'd put this guy to the hot test. He may have flitted over just ahead of us."

"Uh-uh." Mike, who prided himself on being a pretty fair detective, pointed to Nick's pipe. "The dottle is still smoking. Also, his bath towel is damp and his shirt collar as clean and white as the proverbial angel's tooth. Nick

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may have more tricks than Cerberus has fleas, but he wouldn't know we were coming in time to set up red herrings for us."

"Okay, Mike." Rafael sheathed his half drawn sword. "I'm only an errand boy. But I keep wondering why Nick should be circling around when he's supposed to be on his sabbatical leave."

Michael chuckled. "You have to admit Nick does his job seriously. He's taking a postman's holiday by checking on his inferiors—or pretending to do so. I fancy he's kidding himself into believing we haven't caught on to the new projects he's been starting in his place."

"Little Cletus gave that away," Rafe said with a laugh. "I caught him snooping around a while ago, and he ratted on his boss when I gave the little brat a ray-gun. A harmless one, of course."

"Pretty smooth work, fella," Mike applauded. "I've tried to get the kid to work for me as a stoolie but didn't get to first base. Let's shove off. Nick may think he's going to fix up a modern Elysian Fields, but the Boss is laying—"

The two angelic police vanished like light off a mirror, and Nick heaved a gusty sigh. He wiped sweat off Pudzy's smooth brow.

"When hasn't The BBU been laying for me?" he reflected. "He puts up new gates, I'll rig up a heater that'll melt anything. If He tosses us into the burning lake again, I'll set up a cyclotron, and free a few zillion atomic nuclei that will make the lake overflow and roast everybody on Earth. Anyway, He needs Hell. What kind of harp players would He get up there if they haven't worked their way past my place?"

Undisturbed, Nick worked happily all that summer, carrying on experiments along the line of electronic gadgets and an improved technique of atom smashing. He liked the work so well he frequently found himself in a "hell with Hell" attitude. This caused him to ponder over putting Jake Pudzy into the burning lake and staying on Earth a few centuries—a satanic solution of the problem which had arisen in June.

On September 15, however, when his sabbatical leave ended, he dutifully registered Jacob Michael Przmdzy as a Junior in Electrical Engineering. After a year of hell Pudzy certainly should be good enough at lying to say he wanted to review the course. With his rep as an athlete he could get away with anything. Making Doctor Przmdzy eligible for Conference competition was Prexy's worry.

Accordingly, Nick drove his Cad to his date's sorority house with a relatively clear conscience for a devil. As a gesture of good will, he had built a two-hundred-thousand-dollar home for his fraternity brothers, but it wasn't large enough. The whole school had been invited. This masked ball to

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end all masked balls would be in the new gym in the name of PDO.

In contributing the new gymnasium to the Uni he had paid double to spur the contractor into finishing by September. Nick went dressed as a cowboy after cagily inducing a dozen Freshmen to appear as satans. He gave them smoke bombs, an ancient device, true, but the red devils who exploded them added to the hilarity.

Rafe and Mike and a score of their scouts put in their invisible appearance, but Nick wasn't greatly worried. It was an old custom designed to halt any nefarious mass-temptation trick. The liquor had hardly begun to flow, however, when a couple of stony-jawed lads from the Internal Revenue Department barged in. They had no trouble locating Pudzy, easily distinguished by the lovely coeds about him.

"Come with us, Pudzy," said the bigger T-man who needed a shave. "You're wanted in our home office. You know—Washington."

"On your way, you billygoat," Pudzy's partner said. "This is my night to throw loops." The latest Campus Queen, she had come dressed as a modern cowgirl in boots, quirt, and Bikini ranch outfit.

"Pipe down, Gorgeous," Nick admonished, and turned to the spokesman for Uncle Sam. "What's eating them in Washington, Mac? I made my income tax return, paid Uncle Whiskers twenty-two thousand of his funny dollars."

"Sure, but you still owe us three hundred fifty-six thousand for income you didn't report, see? We get it by figuring the contributions you've been throwing around. And the department wants to know where you got that gold you deposited for credit."

"You crooks make me tired," Nick grumbled. "Ever since Congress caught up with you and your rackets you've been getting tough. Now, quit bothering me or I'll write to my Congressman."

"All that is true," Michael said to Rafael, "and when did Nick ever tell the truth? Check these phoney satans again."

"They're only studes," Rafael began. "Wait till—"

The two head angels pricked up their celestial ears when the other T-man said: "We've assayed that gold, and it didn't come off no Idaho ranch, as you reported—"

Just then, another puff of smoke, this time with the smell of genuine brimstone, brought a yell from the gay students. The true Pudzy stood there on the floor in his temporary state as Hades' boss.

Carelessly letting his mind shield slip, Nick cursed under his breath at the ostentatious manner of Pudzy's arrival. Supposedly, the change-over would be made as privately as the first.

"I'll make a puff of smoke out of him," he raged inwardly.

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Flattening Pudzy for keeps and staying on Earth a few centuries came again into Nick's mind. But letting down his mind shield gave him away.

Both celestial cops snickered. "Forget it, Nick," Mike said not unkindly in a thought message. "We've just caught on to the substitution, and here's Pudzy. On your way, and don't give us any trouble. Your vacation is over."

"What's the hurry?" Nick stalled, eying twenty flaming swords, half drawn. "I'm in the middle of a lab experiment—"

"Sure, we know what you've been doing. The Boss is telling us you've been a pretty good Joe, and is inclined to be lenient. Going?" No one heard this talk. Indeed, the spectators were looking at the pseudo-Satan approaching the doughty Pudzy.

Nick embraced his beautiful partner, and put a five-carat diamond in her hand. Then he bent down and bit the lobe of her left ear. "Be seeing you, Honey," he said, and vanished without a puff of smoke.

A million miles away he looked back and saw the true Pudzy reach for his queen.

"Just a minute, pal," the whiskered T-man said gruffly. "We want you, mister, rep or no rep."

"What the h—, what for?" Pudzy stammered. "Who are you?"

"We told you, but that fake devil stopped us before we finished. One of the sacks of gold you turned in a year ago is radium in pure form. It's worth fifty million bucks—in round figures, of course."

"Wow!" Pudzy reeled, for, as Nick had forewarned him, he now remembered nothing of his year's adventures except as a flimsy dream. "Well, that's fine. When do I collect my fifty million?"

"Are you kidding? Heh! Uncle Sam takes his ninety percent, leaving five million. Deducting the three hundred fifty-six grand in back taxes you owe on undeclared income, and of course minus the fine for that and also the radium caper, nets you a dollar fifteen cents. Here's the check for it if you want to settle—"

Click-clicking over the vast wastes of Chaos, Nick felt more like himself again. He let out his old Satanic laugh. "Me for Hell!" he shouted, and gave his whistle. "Open those gates!"

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hell fire

by . . . Isaac Asimov

It was a new departure in A-bomb spectator appeal. But it jelled without benefit of clergy.

THERE WAS a stir as of a very polite first-night audience. Only a handful of scientists were present, a sprinkling of high brass, some congressmen—and a few newsmen.

Alvin Horner of the Washington Bureau of the *Continental Press* found himself sitting next to Joseph Vincenzo of Los Alamos. He said hopefully: "*Now* we ought to learn something."

Vincenzo stared at him through bifocals and said, "Yes—but not the important thing."

Horner frowned. What they were about to witness would be the first super-slow-motion films of an atomic explosion. With trick lenses changing directional polarization in flickers, the moment of explosion would be divided into billionth-second snaps. Yesterday, an A-bomb had exploded. Today, the snaps would show the explosion in incredible detail.

Horner said, "You think this new departure won't work?"

Vincenzo looked tormented. "It will work. We've run pilot tests. But the important thing—"

"Yes?"

What paragon of discernment once said that the tiniest pinpoint of creativeness, the most evanescent flicker, from a writer of real stature was worth a half-dozen full-length novels by lesser scribes? We hope we're not making it up! Anyway, this little gem of a story by Isaac Asimov is more than a flicker. Despite its almost unbelievable brevity, it's a tale of somber cosmic grandeur.

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"These bombs are man's death sentence. We don't seem to be able to learn that simple fact." Vincenzo nodded. "Look at our friends here. They're excited and thrilled, but not afraid."

The newsman said, "They know the danger. They're afraid, too."

"Not enough," insisted the scientist. "I've seen men watch an H-bomb blow an island into a hole, and then go home and sleep soundly for ten hours. That's the way human beings are. For thousands of years hell-fire has been preached to them, and it's made no real impression."

"Hell-fire? Are you religious, sir?"

"What you saw yesterday was hell-fire. An exploding atom bomb is hell-fire. *Literally.*"

That was enough for Horner. He got up and changed his seat. But he continued to watch the audience uneasily. Were the assembled spectators really afraid? Did they worry about hell-fire? There was nothing to indicate that they did.

The lights went out, the projector started. On the screen, the firing tower loomed in the middle foreground, gaunt and solitary. The audience grew tensely quiet.

The stillness became absolute.

After a moment a dot of light appeared at the apex of the tower. It was a brilliant, burning point at first. Then, slowly, it budded in a lazy, outward elbowing, moving this way and that, taking on uneven shapes of light-and-shadow, and finally growing oval.

A man cried out chokingly, then others. There was a hoarse babble of voices, followed by thick silence. Horner could smell fear. He could taste terror in his own mouth, feel his blood congeal.

The oval fire-ball had sprouted projections! It paused a moment in stasis, before expanding rapidly into a bright and featureless sphere.

And in that moment of stasis the expanding ball of fire had shown dark spots for eyes, with dark lines above them for thin, flaring eyebrows. And where a hair-line came down V-shaped a mouth twisted upward, laughing wildly in the hell-fire. And there were horns.

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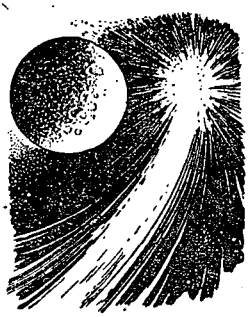
You Still Have Time...



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a question of time

by . . . Edmund Cooper

If a star seeker so desires he may bend eternity to his will. Or he may choose as his guiding star the maxim: "Gorillas grab!"

A THIN STREAK of light curved silently out of the black sky, down towards the almost featureless lava plain and the wide white circle which marked the landing area. The rocket hovered for a moment, sitting on its tail of green flame. Then the touch-down shoes made contact, and the flame died.

Presently passengers and crew, wearing combination pressure suits, descended from the entry-port by a nylon ladder. The tractor was already waiting for them. When they had settled themselves comfortably in its long pressurized trailer, it swung round and headed for a small cluster of plastic bubbles about a mile away in a southerly direction.

Five minutes later, over cups of steaming coffee at the Moon spaceport, the passengers were giving their entry permits to the Control Officer and being routed for ultimate destinations.

Among them was a tall white-haired man whose appearance and age seemed to discredit the photograph and sworn statement on his

The demarcation lines between simple innocence combined with high intelligence and shrewd self-seeking allied with guile are certain to be sharply drawn in Man's coming struggle for a great and enduring tomorrow. In this prophetic novelette two such lines appear as arrows of radiance, separating divergent worlds of the mind, and pointing the way to a future which we can make either jungle-centered or sublime. We are happy to welcome for the second time to our pages a writer of Mr. Cooper's hardy British stature, and skill with words.

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permit. The Control Officer was frankly puzzled.

"Just a moment, Professor Reigner. We have your age here as forty-five. Is that—"

"Quite correct," said Otto Reigner with a grim smile. "Anticipating some scepticism, I also brought my birth certificate and a letter of credence. Here they are."

The Control Officer took the documents and looked at them carefully. They were indisputably genuine, but he was still dissatisfied.

"Is this a recent photograph, sir?" he asked.

"It was taken less than three months ago," Reigner assured him.

"But you look twenty years younger on it."

"That is so," said Reigner calmly, replacing the documents in his wallet. He did not seem inclined to offer explanations.

"But under the circumstances, sir—"

"If you think I'm an impostor, I can only advise you to check with Earth. I suggest you contact the Department of Hydroponics, Polar Division."

The Control Officer looked slightly unhappy. The name Reigner was very well known in the scientific world, and he had no wish to make a fool of himself.

"Not an impostor, sir," he protested helplessly. "Only it's my duty to see that facts correspond with data."

"Proceed quickly, then," said Reigner. "I have urgent business in Lunar City."

The Control Officer saw a way out. "*With whom, sir?*"

"With the Co-ordinator, Star-ship Research."

"S.S.R.? Excuse me a moment. I'll give them a ring and let them know you're on the way." He turned towards a small office.

The smile on Reigner's face flickered. "They will be quite surprised," he said drily, "to hear that I'm an old man."

The Control Officer vanished with an apologetic shrug. A couple of minutes later he emerged from the office looking partly reassured.

"They're expecting you, Professor Reigner," he said. "There's a Moon taxi waiting by the airlock. Will you come this way, please?"

The taxi rocket touched down by the eastern airlock of Lunar City. It had covered the fifty miles from the spaceport in exactly six minutes.

The instant he stepped out of the airlock Reigner found a courier waiting for him. He was taken down a broad avenue between rows of hiduminium buildings to the Administrative Headquarters. Presently he was waiting in an anteroom, staring at a door marked *Co-ordinator Star-ship Research,* while his courier talked to the man on the other side.

He was not kept waiting long. Reigner heard the courier being dismissed, then he saw the Co-

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ordinator's dome-like head appear in the doorway.

"Will you come in, Professor?"

He took a seat opposite the Co-ordinator's desk and declined an introductory cigarette. Reigner was subjected to a swift, searching glance; and noted at the same time that Co-ordinator Jansen concealed his surprise admirably.

"It's a pleasure to receive such a distinguished biochemist," said Jansen politely. "What can I do for you?"

Reigner came straight to the point. "You're probably as busy as I was until it became necessary for me to come and see you. So I won't waste your time. When did you last hear from Star Base Three?"

Jansen raised his eyebrows. "Star Base Three? As a matter of fact, we're expecting a routine call any time. There hasn't been anything for the last three days—which isn't unusual, of course, during a test series. I expect—"

"You've tried to establish contact from this end?" interrupted Reigner.

"Yes, but without urgency. So far as we know there isn't any reason to panic. Copernicus is fifty-six miles wide, and there are installations all round the crater, with only a dozen men—including your brother—to handle the lot. Now what's on your mind?"

Professor Reigner leaned back in his chair wearily. "There isn't any Star Base Three," he said. "Neither is there any star-ship. Don't ask me how I know. I'll tell you when we've inspected the wreckage."

Jansen was not a man to react slowly. He flipped an intercom switch and gave orders for an inspection rocket to be made available. Then he turned back to Reigner. "What about the personnel?" he asked.

"Dead," answered Reigner unemotionally. "All of them. I'll show you where the bodies are."

"And your brother?"

"Yes, Max is dead. But we won't find him. Not yet."

The one thing that impressed Jansen was Reigner's utter certainty. Yet the Co-ordinator was aware that this was the first time the Professor had visited the Moon. How could he know about a catastrophe when no news concerning it had yet reached Lunar City?

Oddly, Jansen didn't doubt the Professor for a moment. And suddenly he remembered an interesting fact about the Reigner brothers. They were identical twins.

The Co-ordinator had a sudden mental image of Max Reigner, a tall, dark-haired, vigorous man who looked as if he might still be on the right side of forty. Then he stared incredulously at the man on the other side of his desk—the man with white hair and wrinkled face. He was tall, certainly, but like a dry stick.

Otto Reigner seemed to divine his thoughts. "Three days ago," he

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said, "I was twenty years younger. I'll tell you about that, too. But later."

A voice came over the Co-ordinator's intercom: "Inspection rocket standing by, sir."

"Thank you." It suddenly occurred to Jansen that he was not being very hospitable to the man who had travelled two hundred and forty thousand miles to see him. "Would you like to have a rest before we start, Professor? Or a meal, perhaps? Copernicus is about twelve hundred miles from here."

Reigner shook his head. "How long will it take to get there?"

"About forty-five minutes."

"I'm living on coffee and sedatives," said the Professor. "Both of which can be taken on the way. That's what comes of jumping twenty years overnight."

II

THE EQUATORIAL crater Copernicus was bathed in green Earthlight. As he gazed through the vizor of his headpiece, while the rocket was still circling at a thousand feet, Professor Reigner was thankful that the green glow toned down the hard contours of the mountains and the desolate rocky flats which they encircled.

Jansen spoke to the pilot. "Touch down by the main hutments—what's left of them."

The rocket swooped low, curtsied like a ballerina, and sank gracefully on its tail. Jansen was climbing down the ladder almost before the motors had cut out. Reigner followed him clumsily, having not yet adjusted to the weak gravity.

Silently they walked to a small and unmistakably recent crater surrounded by a few twisted girders and metal plates that were torn and crumpled like paper.

Jansen's voice came over his personal radio, taut and strained. "An atomic grenade, by the look of it. But they didn't have any here."

"No, it was a discarded Zimova Drive unit," said Reigner. "Max took it from one of the pilot rockets and altered the timing. He wanted to make sure that all records were effectively destroyed."

"I see." The Co-ordinator picked up a strip of metal and examined it. "What do you know about the Zimova Star Drive?"

"Only what Max told me."

"Much?"

"Not enough to be any use, I'm afraid. My line is biochemistry—not sub-space physics."

Jansen walked slowly round the miniature crater, gazing at it with intense concentration. Reigner kept pace with him.

"Do you think he was insane?" asked the Co-ordinator suddenly.

"Give me an objective definition of insanity, and I'll tell you."

Jansen's voice sounded very quiet, as if he were talking to himself. "Five years is too long. Nobody does a five-year tour and gets

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away with it. But the damn fool wouldn't go back to Earth—not even for a couple of months. He claimed he was always on the point of getting a plus two transition. And this is how it ends."

"It ended with a plus ten transition," said Reigner calmly. "He would have got more, but the transponder died. He realized then that Conrad Zimova, when he built the original unit, must never have considered the full implications of beating the light barrier. According to Max, Zimova was merely hoping for a drive that would take men out to the stars within the space of a single lifetime. He would have been satisfied with a safe minus transition of point five.

"Apparently it didn't occur to him that if you could actually get into the plus range the way was open for an indefinite series. When Max got plus ten, it dawned on him that the interval of transition might be extended until it became instantaneous at infinity—until, in fact, signals came back from all parts of the universe simultaneously. That way, a star-ship could hop round the galaxies—literally in no time at all."

"Ten times faster than light!" exclaimed Jansen. "He must have been insane! Assuming he got it, what in hell would be the use of it? What could you experience at ten light-years per year?"

"Absolute duration," said Reigner. "It can only be described as a directed stillness. In effect, you would fall through the fabric of space until you hit a previously set deceleration point. As you slowed down to the speed of light, you would emerge in space-time again. You would re-enter the world of reality as it appears to those who exist at sub-light velocities.

"In the process of re-entering, you might achieve orientation—you might, in fact, select the star pattern you want and use its sub-light velocity as a kind of crash barrier. The effect would be like a rocket being slowed down by dense atmosphere. Only in this case the atmosphere would be a series of electro-magnetic fields. Anyway, that was Max's theory. And he proved it."

Jansen's features were remarkably well hidden by his headpiece, but his voice quivered with excitement. "He could only prove it by making a star journey, and even if he tried for Proxima Centauri, he couldn't bring back the proof for nearly a year. Unless the transition was more than ten plus."

Professor Reigner was silent for a few moments. Then he said: "The round trip to Procyon is, I believe, twenty-one light-years. Figure out the transition ratio if it could be accomplished in four days."

"Are you suggesting that—"

"I'm sorry to play the mystery man, Co-ordinator. But I had to show you that Base Three is destroyed and that there isn't any

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star-ship before I could hope to make you accept my explanation. The truth is too fantastic to stand without evidence."

Jansen stared at the wrecked installations. "I'd be surprised if the truth wasn't fantastic," he said drily. "Incidentally, where are the bodies?"

Reigner pointed. A quarter of a mile away, standing near the remains of a living-unit, was a lunar tractor.

"They knew too much. They helped bring the Zimova Drive to perfection. They saw it reach a ten plus transition on the pilot rocket. So Max killed them."

"In God's name, why?"

"You yourself suggested insanity, but it is not quite so simple. For five years Max never considered the implications of success. Then, when the theory became fact, when he had it in his power to give humanity the means of conquering interstellar space—of dominating the galaxy, even—he suddenly realized that man was not yet ready to face such tremendous possibilities.

"Unfortunately, the Zimova Drive wasn't his secret alone. If he destroyed the star-ship and pilot rockets, there still remained men who could build others. That is why he killed them."

While Reigner was speaking, they had begun to walk towards the tractor.

"It still fits my definition of insanity," said the Co-ordinator grimly. "By himself, a man can't take decisions like that. He can't set himself up as a supreme judge to decide what's good for the whole human race. You mentioned Procyon. Am I to understand that he took the ship for a test voyage? It doesn't make sense."

"The last proof," said Reigner. "Whatever else he was, Max was still the scientist. He had to know beyond any shadow of doubt that man could survive the transition—and that he hadn't murdered his colleagues in vain."

"*He*" had to know," growled Jansen. "The rest of us don't matter a damn."

"Not quite," said the Professor. "Max took a witness—one who might have a good chance of survival. He didn't want to leave you with an unsolved mystery on your hands."

"Who did he take?"

"Me," said Professor Reigner.

They had reached the tractor. Eleven bodies had been neatly stacked inside its pressurized compartment. But the airlock was open. Jansen scrambled through it and examined the dead men. There were no signs of violence at all.

"It is expedient that eleven men shall die to save humanity." Jansen's voice was bitter. "Even if that were so, I don't think these boys would have appreciated the historical perspective. How did he do it?"

Reigner gazed at the corpses

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somberly. "Carbon monoxide. It was before we became *en rapport* . . . There would have been no suffering."

Jansen came out of the tractor, closing the airlock behind him. He gave the Professor a searching look. But Earth-light, glinting on the vizor of his headpiece, effectively screened Reigner's expression.

"Let's get this straight, Professor. You've never been to the Moon before, yet you took a test voyage on a ship using the Zimova Drive. You were never at Base Three, yet you know all about its destruction. Your age is forty-five, yet you look more than sixty! I think the time has come to fill in a few minor details."

Reigner's grim laughter came over his personal radio like a harsh croaking. "There's one other thing, Co-ordinator. The star-ship is due back in about twenty hours. It has been programmed to crash here in Copernicus."

Jansen was getting beyond surprise. "Naturally, it's going to crash. Otherwise, we'd have the perfected Zimova Drive. But why pick on Copernicus? Why should it come back here?"

Reigner spoke slowly. "Can you imagine how lonely it is to die among the stars? Max wasn't altogether ruthless, you know. Those men he killed were his friends, the men with whom he worked and whose world he shared. This would be his way of coming back to them, of making the same sacrifice. Who knows? It may be his way of reporting success."

"Insane," said the Co-ordinator flatly. "It's the only possible explanation . . . And now you'd better tell me all about it, right from the beginning."

"It's quite a long story. If there's any coffee left on board the rocket, I think I could use some. You might as well listen in comfort."

The two men turned round and tramped slowly back over the dusty, barren rockface towards the inspection rocket. Their footsteps superimposed themselves on the startlingly fresh tracks of men who were already dead, and of one whose distance away could only be measured in light-years.

Presently, Reigner and Jansen reached the rocket and climbed the ladder. And with even intensity, green Earth-light poured down upon the crater Copernicus —a great bowl of desolation with, here and there, a few fragments of twisted metal as evidence of an already petrified tragedy. And circling the entire lake of dusty rock, a ring of saw-toothed uneroded mountains, heavy with the secrets of a billion years.

III

MAX REIGNER and Haggerty, the electronics rigger, were in the radio room waiting for firing point and filling in the time with a fate-

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ful and classic argument. Outside the laboratory unit, three miles away, the experimental rocket threw its long slender shadow across the crater floor. The sun was already low over the mountains. In another few hours, the harsh contours of Copernicus would soften under a green twilight. But by that time, *Pilot 7 Mark III* would no longer stand glowing like a fat metallic cigar in the barren crater.

Pilot 7 would already have passed out of sub-light existence and be cruising at a radiation-plus velocity through unimaginable stretches of galactic desert. Or else, having failed to pass the light barrier, it would be nothing more than a thin skein of vapor, drifting with a snail-like certainty towards some hungry star.

Max Reigner had great hopes for *Pilot 7*. The *Mark III* Zimova unit had been rebuilt and re-orientated from diamond pivots to oscillator, and Tim Haggerty's work on the deuteron discharge had increased its efficienty to ninety-three percent. But chiefly he was optimistic because intuition told him that there could be no more improvements to make, and that now there remained but two simple possibilities.

Either he would get a plus transition increasing until the transponder failed, or else he would know finally that the Zimova technique was a waste of time. And after five years of hard work rewarded only by failure, Max Reigner still had faith in the Zimova Drive. Now that the bugs had been shaken out of it, now that the deuteron efficiency had been stepped up, there could only be one result.

He stared impatiently at the vision screen, at the fiery silhouette of *Pilot 7*. In another twenty minutes, it would dissolve into a blazing arc. He began to fret about the radio-stroboscope and wonder how long the transponder would hold out, and at the same time he tried to listen to what Haggerty was saying.

The electronics rigger was developing his favorite theme. "... So you've got to have conflict. It isn't love, it isn't money that makes the world go round. It's just good, old-fashioned, club-him-and-grab-it conflict. Take the dinosaur; take Neanderthal man; take the civilizations of Egypt, Greece and Rome. What made them fold? What made them pack up and walk right out of history? Nothing but sweet simple conflict.

"Or let's give it a nice physical basis. Let's call it friction. Sooner or later they rubbed up against something that was harder than they were. So they got rubbed out. It's the basic law, Max. Man against odds, civilization against odds, species against odds.

"The whole damn cosmos is a conspiracy organized against every single living thing. And once you get the idea that you're civilized

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enough to get along without relying on that primitive dynamism, without scalping the other fellow before he scalps you, you might as well sit down and write your will. Because you're decadent. That's what's wrong with Earth now. The whole planet has gone soft. You know what it needs to pump back that lost virility?"

Max Reigner stared at the image of *Pilot 7*, and ran a hand through his dark hair. He said drily: "I have my own misguided ideas, but I might as well hear yours."

"The Zimova Drive," announced Haggerty, "with a transition of a hundred plus."

"Tell me more. If we're all saviors here, we might as well know it."

"Take the years out of light-years," explained Haggerty, tossing himself a cigarette, "and what are we going to get? Star-ships. Hundreds of 'em. Fleets of 'em. Cruising round the Galaxy looking for plums. Like the Romans when they got their teeth into Africa, or the Spaniards when they stepped ashore in Mexico, or the British in India. We're going to hit a new age of empire-building. The Solar System versus the rest.

"Can't you see it, a hundred years from now, the Solar Empire with maybe fifty habitable planets under our control? That's the kind of challenge to put the guts back into humanity. And here are we, all set to trigger a new deal in history. If that *Mark Third* unit does the trick, we'll make Cortes, Alexander, Caesar and the rest look like juvenile delinquents."

"If I thought so," said Reigner coldly, "I'd wreck the experimental rockets right now. And I'd make it my business to break up every other star project. The trouble with you, Haggerty, is that you're just a self-seeking anachronism. Your ugly little jungle mind slobbers for power and possession."

"We're in the cosmic jungle," grinned Haggerty. "Got to look for coconuts and watch out for tigers."

"We're in the cosmic laboratory," retorted Reigner. "We're here to make experiments and to investigate—not to spend our time grabbing test-tubes from each other."

Haggerty's amusement increased. "You be the scientist, I'll be the gorilla. History's on my side. What happens to every nice invention served up by the gentlemen scientists? The gorillas grab it for their own use—from arrowheads to atomic disintegration, from windmills to solar power.

"They'll grab the Zimova Drive, too. Pretty soon, there'll be shiploads of educated gorillas drifting round the stars, using atomics, ultrasonics, therm jets and what-have-you to peel their celestial bananas. Who knows, maybe I'll be out there myself—staking out a billion acres on Planet X, or organizing a squad of three-legged coolies."

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Max Reigner glanced at the clock, then twisted the screen controls to get a sharper outline of *Pilot 7*. A voice came over the wallspeaker: "Five minutes to firing point."

The physicist looked thoughtfully at Haggerty. "You're a third-rate cynic and a first-rate fool. If you read any history at all, you'd realize that the sort of piracy you seem to admire damn near finished off the planet—until science forced the grab-it boys to co-operate or die. And now you want to start the same kind of free-for-all again on a cosmic scale.

"Don't you people ever learn? Doesn't it occur to you that, sooner or later, the grab-type is bound to grab something that's too big for him to handle? And what happens if you go out to the stars and find other educated gorillas with a better science behind them? You take them on, I suppose, until they find your home planet and do a spot of colonizing themselves. Or destroy it."

"Three minutes to firing point," said the wallspeaker.

Haggerty blew a cloud of smoke and stubbed out his cigarette. "Survival of the fittest," he said. "If they're strong enough to lick us, good luck to 'em. The law of the cosmic jungle."

"Cosmic lunacy! You're emotionally retarded. You think of a star-ship as a galactic privateer. To me, it's a survey ship—a means of getting out and looking, not getting out and taking. Before I'd present the successful star-drive to a bunch of trigger-happy pirates, I'd either destroy it or them. Now stop blathering, and wrap yourself round that box of tricks. I want a dead accurate strobograph."

"Here's to it," said Haggerty, glancing at *Pilot 7*. "Prototype *Santa Maria*—star version. You know, I like you, Max. You're a magnificent paradox. You think you're just a peaceful scientist; but in your heart you're as homicidal as the rest of us. Only difference is, you'd kill for ideas, not things."

"One minute to firing point," said the wallspeaker. "Forty-five seconds . . . Thirty seconds . . . Fifteen seconds . . . Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one—*zero!*"

On the vision screen there was a sudden brightness as the volatility rocket lifted *Pilot 7* out of Copernicus. In a few more minutes, when it was clear of the Moon's G field, the booster would cut in. Then, when that died, the Zimova unit would come into action. Already the transponder was pinging at one-second intervals.

Max Reigner watched the experimental rocket swing silently up as if lifted on the rim of an invisible wheel. Up past the mountains in a bright blaze of sunlight.

There was nothing more to be seen. He turned to the transponder and waited. It continued pinging evenly, and the figures began to

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come out on a thin strip of paper. He looked at Tim Haggerty, hunched over the radio-stroboscope like a giant spider, his fingers delicately adjusting the range control, his eyes fixed on the swinging red needle, while the pattern of oscillations was graphed by an automatic stylo.

One thought began to repeat itself insistently in Reigner's tense mind: *Gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab . . .* It became meaningless—a hypnotic incantation.

He looked at the figures coming out of the transponder. 1.00 — 1.00 — 1.00 — 1.00 — 1.00 — 1.00 — 1.01 — 1.01 —

Reigner fancied he could detect the slightly different interval, that he could appreciate audibly the difference of a hundredth of a second. 1.01 — 1.01 — 1.02 — 1.02 —

As soon as the figures had begun to change, he knew that the Zimova unit was operating. There would be a steep climb, now, as *Pilot 7* ploughed into the close sub-light velocities. Or else there would be an eloquent silence. The last experimental ship had blown itself out of existence at 1.70. At more than a hundred thousand miles a second in terms of a space-time block which it could not physically occupy.

The idea of the velocity check was elegantly simple. *Pilot 7* produced pinger signals at the rate of one every second. If, eventually, those signals were received at one every two seconds it would mean that the ship had achieved threshold velocity—that is, the speed of light.

Any subsequent increase in interval would show that the light barrier had been passed and that total submersion in space had been achieved. At which point, theoretically, there could be no further physical crises, and there would be nothing to stop *Pilot 7* stepping up to an infinite velocity.

Gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab, thought Reigner mechanically. And then he heard the pinger signals change to a lower note. The difference in interval was apparent. The numbers on the paper roll were increasing quickly. 1.20 — 1.25 — 1.31 — 1.38 — 1.46 — 1.54 — 1.64 —

Gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab . . . There was sweat on Reigner's forehead. His hands were shaking so much he could scarcely hold the strip of paper steady. The figures began to dance before his eyes—a rhythmic jungle dance.

"Good Lord, we've passed it!" croaked Haggerty. The red needle gave a violent lurch, then remained steady. The graph stopped looking like a mountain range and became a smooth parabola.

1.75 — 1.86 — 1.98 — *Pilot 7* was passing 180,000 miles per second. Then the pinger hit the two-second interval. There was a faint

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suggestion of hesitation, a sudden change of note.

Haggerty flung an awestruck glance at his chief; and at the same time, the radio-stroboscope went dead.

But still the numbers came out of the transponder.

2.21 — 2.35 — 2.5 — 2.66 —

"Light!" roared Haggerty. "By heaven, we've licked it. We've knocked it silly!"

"Listen to the pinger," snapped the physicist. "It's beginning to throb!" And still that damned incantation, picking up the rhythm of the pinger. *Gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab . . . gorillas grab . . .*

2.83 — 3.01 — 3.20 — 3.40 — 3.61 — 3.83 — 4.07 —

"Six hundred thousand miles a second!" gasped Haggerty. "We've done it! We'll hit the million!"

"Quiet, you fool!" Reigner's voice was high-pitched, breaking.

4.32 — 4.58 — 4.85 — 5.13 — 5.42 — 5.72 — 6.03 — 6.35 — 6.68 — 7.02 — 7.37 — 7.75 — 8.14 — 8.54 — 8.95 — 9.37 — 9.80 — 10.24 — 10.69 — 11.15 — Silence. The pinger broke off in mid-moan. The transponder died.

White-faced, Reigner collapsed in his chair, not trusting himself to speak.

"A transition of ten plus," whispered Haggerty. "Two million miles a second. Think of it! Two million crazy miles a second! Gimme some wings and call me a fairy. By God, we've knocked a hole clean through space! Ten years from now we'll have a fleet of 'em buzzing round the Galaxy." His voice rose gaily. "Up the old Solar Empire—and three cheers for the gentlemen scientists!"

Reigner said nothing. He sat hunched in his chair, staring ahead with unseeing eyes. But in imagination, there was the vision of *Pilot 7* coursing swiftly through the sub-dimensional void. And sitting astride it, wearing an inane toothy grin, was a barrel-chested gorilla.

Presently, others came into the radio room. They looked at Reigner curiously, then listened to Haggerty's highly dramatic account of the transition build-up and its technical implications. And after a time, Reigner came back to life.

He listened to congratulations. He allowed his hand to be shaken, his back to be slapped. He registered a vague smile and mumbled words that had no meaning for him.

He realized dimly that he was being taken to the living-unit, where bottles were being opened, and the Base personnel were proposing toasts. Then Haggerty, with an ironic gleam in his eye, called on him to make a formal speech.

Reigner pulled himself together and began to talk. And as he talked, his gaze wandered round the circle of well-known faces. He seemed to be looking for something—something he knew he would never find.

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The men of Star Base Three, looking at their chief, saw in the strange brilliance of his eyes a vision of solar expansion, the dream of a space-born civilization bridging the star-gaps—perhaps, even, in the final stage, a unified segment of the Galaxy controlled by the benevolent despots of Earth. All this and more would be possible with star-ships using the perfected Zimova Drive, and manned by explorers intent on "pacifying" other life-forms on other planets in the name of Progress.

But Reigner's eyes were only bright with tears. There would be no great star-rush, no celestial Klondike, no stampede of educated gorillas to slake their Earth-born avarice on distant worlds.

He looked sadly at that small circle of men—men who had worked with him for months, in some cases years, on the Zimova unit. The men who had shared his faith.

The men who would have to die.

Reigner cursed himself silently for being a scientist first and a human being second; for being a specialist and therefore only a clever idiot; for concentrating on means and forgetting all about ends. For failing to realize that humanity was still just a gawky adolescent.

As soon as he could, he escaped from the general celebrations and made his way to the dormitory. He lay down on his bunk, closed his eyes and tried to relax. But sleep, when it came, brought no relief—only the dream symbolism of what he needed to forget.

IV

MAX REIGNER awoke when everyone else had turned in. He switched on his bunk light and saw that he had been asleep six hours. The reality of his achievement—for, basically, the success belonged to him—came flooding back. And with it, knowledge of the consequences.

He wanted to delay, but there was no need to delay. There was no excuse. In fact, if it was to be done at all, it would have to be done quickly. Already he should have contacted Co-ordinator Jansen at Lunar City and given him the results. Before long, the silence at Star Base Three would make Lunar City anxious. They would send someone out.

Nor did the star-ship itself present any excuse for delay. It had sat patiently on its tail in the desolate crater for more than fifteen years—ever since Conrad Zimova had taken the sister-ship on a voyage that had ended in silence.

Reigner knew why Zimova had never returned. The ship had vaporized long before it even reached the transition range. But now the original unit had been replaced by a *Mark III*—identical with the one that had successfully operated in *Pilot 7*. It only remained for him to climb aboard,

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close the entry-port and start the take-off motor.

Reviewing the situation as he lay in his bunk in the semi-darkness, Max Reigner became suddenly calm—calmer than he had ever been. He listened to the quiet, steady breathing of the others, and formulated his plan of action.

After a time, he got up noiselessly and tiptoed to the door. In the ante-room he put on a pressure suit, then went towards the airlock.

A few seconds later, he stepped outside the living unit and was alone under the black star-riddled sky. The sun had totally disappeared, leaving only a dull green Earth-light that gave the mountains of Copernicus an odd illusion of movement during the long lunar darkness.

Reigner stared at the stars for a moment or two, then began to walk briskly over the hard rocky floor, heading for the chemilab. Presently, he returned with two gas cylinders on a small trolley. He took them to the dormitory airlock and dumped them, one at a time, in the pressure chamber. Then he closed the outer door, raised the pressure and finally took off his headpiece so that he would be able to hear.

Cautiously, he maneuvered each cylinder into the dormitory. He stood still, listening, until he was satisfied that no one was awake. Then he unscrewed the taps. The hiss of escaping carbon monoxide seemed to him like the roar of terrestrial rapids. But no one stirred. After a couple of minutes he went out, closing the door quietly behind him.

For the next few hours, Max Reigner pursued the grim work of demolition with tremendous energy, giving himself hardly any time to rest and no time at all to think. Everything in Copernicus must be destroyed—with the exception of the star-ship. All records of the Zimova technique and the painstaking research which had led to its perfection would be obliterated for ever.

He took a personnel tractor and set out across the crater on his wrecking tour. At each laboratory, each workshop, each storechamber, he used whatever materials came to hand—volatility fuels, solid explosives, old rocket motors and even a couple of *Mark II* Zimova units. At the power-house, he smashed the governors on the atomic engine; and even as he drove away, the whole plant shot silently skywards in a great gout of flame.

Eventually, there was only one group of buildings left—the dormitory and the living-unit. He swung the tractor round and headed back across the crater, driving crazily at full speed over the unyielding rock. The tour of destruction had already taken him more than a hundred miles.

Presently, the star-ship loomed on the horizon—a tall slender col-

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umn pointing ominously up towards the great star-gaps. He drove past it without stopping. There was yet the final act of destruction before he could make that fateful voyage—before he could make the ultimate test of the Zimova Drive and see whether a human being could survive the transition.

A thought suddenly struck him. Suppose he had killed in vain! Suppose it was impossible for living tissue to survive the big jump! Suppose the stars could never have been menaced by boatloads of educated gorillas anyway!

But in his heart, Reigner did not believe in failure, could not even accept it as possible. The star-flight would doubtless be traumatic. But man had learned to face trauma—had managed to survive the greatest trauma of all—birth. This, too, might be a kind of birth.

The tractor stopped. Reigner saw that his own hand had switched off the engine. With surprise, he realized that he was back at the dormitory. He jumped down from the tractor and went to the airlock. As he passed through, he automatically took off his headpiece.

There was no sound of breathing now. No deadly hiss of carbon monoxide. The cylinders were empty. The bodies lay quite still in their bunks. Reigner felt a warning heaviness, swayed a little, and hastily put on his headpiece again. Then he tried to switch on the main light; and only when it didn't work did he remember that he had blown up the power-house. He unhooked the torch from his belt and went round to inspect the dead.

No signs of stress. They were peaceful enough. They might still have been sleeping. He looked at Tim Haggerty—eyes closed, lips closed, but still wearing that damnable smile.

Reigner had meant to destroy everything; but he could not bring himself to destroy the bodies. As he took them out to the tractor, one by one, he wondered what his motive might be.

They were dead, and nothing worse could happen to them. It wouldn't matter to them whether their bodies were blown to bits or preserved like mummies in the lunar vacuum. He tried to remember if he had ever believed in ghosts.

At last, the work of demolition was completed. With the wrecking of the dormitory and living-unit, Star Base Three was completely razed to the ground. All that remained of an experimental station founded on the proposition that mankind shall reach the stars were a couple of tractors, eleven bodies, a star-ship and a man who had chosen the most elaborate method of committing suicide ever devised.

Presently there would be only the tractors and the bodies, wrap-

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ped in an impregnable cocoon of silence.

Max Reigner began to walk towards the star-ship. It was quite a distance, and he could have taken a tractor. But he preferred to walk. He wanted to feel the hard ground under his feet. Above all, he would have given anything—if there had been anything left to give—to take off his headpiece and breathe once more the living air of Earth.

As he walked, he glanced at the green-tinted lava beds, the green mountains of Copernicus. He tried to clothe their sharp contours in his imagination with grass and trees, and the now almost forgotten beauty of rivers.

He arrived at the ship too soon, knowing that it would always have been too soon. As he climbed aboard, he began to wonder how long it would take the two remaining star bases on the Moon to catch up with the Zimova project.

Twenty years? Fifty? A hundred? It was hard to say, because they had different lines of approach. They were still working on atomic methods. No one but Max Reigner had had sufficient faith in the Zimova technique to waste his time on the whys and wherefors of an incomprehensible transition. The mathematicians laughed and said it was theoretically possible, *but* . . . The conventional physicists merely shrugged.

Conrad Zimova had been mad; and so, apparently, was Max Reigner. If he wanted to chase a shadow, they couldn't stop him; but neither would they help him. Which was one of the reasons why there had been only eleven assistants at Base Three when the other bases had a complement of fifty. The Administration could afford to lose a certain amount of money, but not too much.

Closing the entry-port behind him, finally cutting himself off from a world that understood too little and always knew too much, Reigner concluded that it might well be a hundred years before human beings could successfully bridge the star-gaps.

Long enough for the educated gorillas to drop the grab game? He didn't know. He could only hope.

He went up to the navigation deck, took out a star-map, closed his eyes and put a finger down. Procyon. A near star. He was irrationally glad.

The time it took him, working with computer and auto-pilot, to get the programming equations out was meaningless. At the end of it all, his knees gave way, and he diagnosed hunger.

He made his way to the mess-deck and got some food together which he ate sitting by an observation frame, and staring fixedly at the gray-green shadows of Copernicus. He didn't seem to be able to taste the food at all; but presently the hunger pains died down. And that was sufficient.

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Eventually, he went back to the navigation deck and lay down on the contour-berth by the main panel. He gazed at the bank of illuminated instruments for a few seconds; then he selected a red switch and pressed it firmly. The volatility motors shuddered into life.

Reigner had expected transition to be a kind of icy bubble of darkness, or a maelstrom that would drain him of all sensation. He had thought that sub-spatial existence would involve the negation of all feeling, even of all perception. He was wrong.

Transition was the cosmic parallel of dawn—a gray light intensifying, permeating the whole star-ship; emanating from the very molecules that, in by-passing the light barrier, had surrendered their own reality and become mere shadows of an organized energy pattern.

Transition was a ripple, a strange shimmering—like the disturbed reflections in a pool. It was a rhythmic stillness, a dance of immobility, the calm waters under a swelling sea of light-years.

Transition was a chord of memory; and above all, it was the absolute loneliness. The long vista of remembered dreams.

The star-ship, a shell without substance, a hurtling citadel of stillness, had passed clean through the mirror of space-time. The only continuum, now, was a bright gray dawn—a lack of movement in the smooth fall to existence.

Reigner was drowning. The gray torrent swirled about him, rocking every fragment of his life in the suddenly sharp kaleidoscope of memory.

And dominating the succession of tableaux—the mirage of childhood, the oddly vivid fictions of Earth-life—was the face of a familiar stranger.

His own reflection? No. There was a subtle difference. A vague confusion. The mystery tormented him until, with a sense of shock, he realized it was the face of his brother.

It was the first time he had thought of Otto since *Pilot 7* had risen from Copernicus. In all his thoughts, in all his calculations, Otto had been a blind spot.

But now the face became clearer, more real. Even more real than himself. It was as if he, Max, had begun to fade in proportion to Otto's increasing reality. As if he, the star-ship and even transition itself had become nothing more than a dream, stretching back through the light barrier into a world of space-time; and through that, through an ultra-dimensional realm of telekinetics, or E.S.P., to the receptive darkness of another mind.

Dimly, Max tried to recall the psychological theory of empathy—*einfühlung*—in relation to twins and super-twins. But the effort was too much. It obtruded on Otto's

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growing reality. It was not a thing to examine too closely in a preternatural dawn-light.

So he waited, trying not to believe that he would drown. Trying to convince himself that the gray torrent of dawn, the whirlpool of isolation, would eventually subside.

And, goaded by the absolute loneliness of transition, he reached out desperately for companionship, projected a living dream, projected a witness into the first star voyage.

V

THEATRE FIVE at Byrd University in the International Zone of Antarctica was filled to capacity. Professor Otto Reigner had just begun his introductory lecture.

His youthful figure contrasted oddly with a grave and occasionally pompous way of speaking; and it was not always easy to remember him as the man chiefly responsible for transforming Antarctica into one of the great food-producing areas of the world.

The audience—mainly young engineers, biochemists and doctors—listened with dutiful attention.

"With a population of four thousand million," the Professor was saying, "it would be foolish of us to expect the soil of this planet to supply our needs adequately and indefinitely. You are all aware of the popular hostility to hydroponics. We need not go into that now." He paused. He appeared to stagger, and suddenly clutched his chest.

The audience leaned forward expectantly. There were stifled exclamations and sly, whispered remarks about hangovers. But the Professor, quickly recovering himself, continued as if nothing had happened; and the audience settled down.

"... It is sufficient for me to mention that a great propaganda and educational campaign is steadily disposing of the current nonsense and suspicion." Another pause. Reigner swayed drunkenly and grabbed at a chair for support.

A low murmur swept round the theatre. A few people at the front stood up with the vague idea of giving assistance. But again the Professor recovered himself quickly, and waved them back with an imperious gesture.

"... In any case, the general distrust of hydroponics and other revolutionary methods of food production is of little actual importance. As the population increases, we shall discover that hunger is a great destroyer of prejudice. I—I—wish to—to concentrate instead ..."

The Professor's face was deathly pale. Suddenly he collapsed. Even before he hit the rostrum a doctor leaped towards him.

After a quick examination, he was lifted on to an emergency stretcher and carried to a small rest-room. Altogether, he remained unconscious for two hours and fifty minutes. The doctors could

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find nothing wrong on a preliminary examination: all responses were normal.

But while they argued among themselves, and applied the more complex heart and brain tests, a slow and incomprehensible change was taking place.

Reigner's pigmentation was altering. His skin was becoming mottled and flaccid. His dark hair imperceptibly turned dull brownish-gray, then gray, then showed streaks of white. And while most of the medicos seemed to be paralyzed by this incredible acceleration of the aging process, one of the brighter ones made another interesting discovery: Professor Reigner was rapidly losing weight.

Eventually, he returned to consciousness. At first, he refused to believe that he had been out for less than three hours. But the facts were inescapable.

Professor Reigner took a look at himself in a mirror, gave a grim smile and said: "Now, gentlemen, will someone kindly register accommodation for me on the next Moon rocket?"

They thought he was mad. They wanted to know what it was all about. They tried to work out the connection between a psychosomatic breakdown and a compulsion to go to Lunar City. Professor Reigner did not enlighten them. He merely repeated his request with increasing urgency.

Eventually, they capitulated; but tried to get him to take a companion, pointing out that a further attack was possible.

The Professor blandly disagreed. There would be no more "attacks," he told them, *because he knew.*

And since his prestige in the scientific world was considerable, and since none of the doctors had the courage to say what they all felt, Professor Reigner got his reservation on the Moon rocket.

Even as he travelled to the spaceport, the aging process continued . . .

The gray dawn-light of transition swirled ever brighter through the shimmering star-ship. The instrument panel, the whole navigation deck, seemed to oscillate slowly between existence and non-existence. Max Reigner could only wait and hope.

. . . But now there was something more real than the entire star voyage—something that checked a tide of insane laughter almost on the point of effecting its own sinister transition. There was—communication!

The transparent shape of Otto Reigner steadily became opaque, steadily clothed itself in the illusion of substance. Watching, fascinated, Max saw the lips move. He heard no sound, but the words flashed clearly in his mind.

And then he felt the thought-stream, the two-way flow of images passing between his own mind and that of his brother.

Otto's pattern resolved itself into dark clouds of bewilderment

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suddenly pierced by a shoal of questions.

Max transmitted images of Star Base Three; of *Pilot 7* rising from Copernicus; of Haggerty's conception of a Solar Empire; of the figures coming from the transponder; of himself taking the cylinders of carbon monoxide into the dormitory; of his tour of destruction; and of the star-ship's journey to transition.

Otto's reply signified understanding and a strange pity. Then he flashed a pattern of stars on which a large question-mark was superimposed.

Max answered with an image of Procyon.

Otto radiated acceptance. Then he threw a picture of the lecture theatre at the University—of himself on the rostrum; of his sudden collapse.

Max flashed anxiety, self-accusation. Otto replied with confidence and curiosity. He walked about the navigation deck, examining the star-ship, while Max lay on his contour-berth—exhausted, but no longer alone. Presently, Otto himself lay down on a contour-berth and waited expectantly.

With an effort, Max glanced at the instrument panel. Everything was still shimmering, still blurred. But he got an impression of the indicator swinging towards deceleration point. And then the gray brightness became unbearable. He closed his eyes, but the brightness seemed to penetrate his body, seemed to drift agonizingly through his brain.

The brightness became a roll of thunder—thunder of light bursting in the star-ship. Until it seemed as if the sheer mass of radiant energy would break everything apart.

Then, suddenly, there was nothing but darkness. The strange wave-world of transition generated a last tremendous ripple. Then it snapped like a taut wire at breaking-point. And there remained only the black infinities of space, the remote tapestry of stars, and a ship that seemed to be the still center of a slowly turning universe.

It was a long time before Max Reigner opened his eyes. Then he got up unsteadily, gazed with disbelief at the now solid contours of the navigation deck, and lurched towards the nearest observation frame.

The constellations had shifted slightly; but the total pattern of the sky was much the same. Without any difficulty, he picked out Betelgeux, Aldebaran, Sirius and others.

Dead ahead, was a strange sun, white and brilliant. He guessed it to be about twenty light-minutes away, and was elated with a sense of achievement. Even through the darkened plastiglass, its radiance was too intense to be faced. There was no mistaking its identity.

Procyon.

He turned to find Otto stand-

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ing by his side, and opened his mouth to speak. The words became sounds, filling the star-ship with their meaning.

Darkness was still the darkness of star-gaps; but soon there would be another darkness, impenetrable, unending.

Astern, the white ball of Procyon began to glow a dull red as the star-ship raced away towards transition. Presently the redness intensified, spreading to other stars and through the constellations. Presently the ship passed smoothly into its approach velocity.

Max Reigner lay helplessly on the contour-berth, keeping his eyes open only by a supreme physical effort. Dully, he wondered if he could manage to last until transition.

Already the figure of Otto was wavering, returning to transparency. Soon Max would no longer be able to hold him. Soon the terrible isolation would return—a brief prelude to eternity.

Images tumbled into his mind, and he realized that Otto was using thought-stream to transmit a warning of his imminent departure, and to ask if there was anything Max would wish him to do when he got back to Earth—*if* he got back.

Exerting himself, Max tried to think. There must be some message or decision. But nothing seemed important any more. Nothing that he could remember.

He flashed back a negative, following it with patterns of gratitude and farewell, all mixed crazily with images of childhood, shared adventures in a world of dreamy unreality.

Suddenly, Otto transmitted an impression of Lunar City, then an interrogative.

Max had an odd impulse to try to flash the Zimova modifications, then became angry at his weakness; and knew that there was no time, anyway. He threw a safe reply, a non-committal reply: *Tell them what you know.*

Otto's answer was affirmative. Then he began to build up another image. It remained faint. It refused to take shape in Max's mind. It drifted away, unrecognizable. He waited for Otto to try again. But there was no second attempt.

Vaguely, Max peered round the navigation deck. There was nothing to be seen. Only that strange remembered shimmering.

Only the gray dawn-light of transition.

VI

CO-ORDINATOR Jansen stared at the man opposite him calmly sipping his coffee. "And you claim it was merely a question of becoming *en rapport?*"

"I did not use the word 'merely'," said Otto Reigner. He hesitated. "Think of it as a kind of resonance, not limited by time or space."

"Dammit, the star-ship wasn't in time or space," said Jansen

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irritably. "Are you trying to tell me that this kind of E.S.P. can operate on a sub-spatial level?"

"Why not?" said Professor Reigner. "Take precognition, for example. It is an established scientific fact. People endowed with the faculty have been able to predict future events under laboratory conditions. Now where is the event at the time of prediction? It is not in space, nor is it in time. It has yet to emerge."

"From sub-space?" demanded Jansen with scepticism.

"Possibly, I don't know. I'm only pointing out that it must have some condition of existence on a level that we can't normally perceive."

The Co-ordinator stared moodily out of the rocket's observation dome as if, in some way, the mute rocks of Copernicus would confirm or deny this fantastic explanation.

At last, he said: "There's no point in wasting our time here. We'd better get back to Lunar City. You can tell me the rest on the way."

"What about the star-ship's return?" asked the Professor.

A thin smile played on Jansen's lips. "In about twenty hours, I think you said. Very well, we'll be here to meet it—just in case it doesn't crash. Why are you so sure it is going to return?"

"Because I assisted with the programming," said the Professor wearily.

The Co-ordinator shrugged. He talked to the pilot over the intercom and gave him his instructions. Then he turned to Professor Reigner.

"You can tell me the rest when we level off. Take it up from the point where you became involved. This psychic stuff is a big pill to swallow. You appreciate that, don't you?"

"None better," came the dry answer. "As you see, it has aged me considerably."

A subdued vibration signalled the rocket's smooth rise. Copernicus dropped quickly away. Looking through the vision panel, the Professor saw only a swinging pattern of stars. He felt unreasonably cold, and began to shiver.

"FANTASTIC," said Co-ordinator Jansen, "utterly fantastic! The devil of it is, I believe you . . . In fact, I've got to believe you. Otherwise—" He broke off helplessly and gazed at Otto Reigner, still sipping his interminable coffee, as if at any moment he expected him to disappear.

They were in Jansen's private apartment at Lunar City, where the Professor was now concluding his story in relative comfort. Even during the short time since his arrival on the Moon, Professor Reigner seemed to have added a few more years to his appearance.

The Co-ordinator began to wonder whether it was just plain fatigue, or whether the "process"

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was still operating. If the latter, he wondered just how long Reigner could last; how long it would be before senility set in, and his mind and body degenerated together.

The Professor seemed to divine his thoughts. "Not very long," he said softly. "The stress was too great. My metabolism is already breaking down. That was the second reason why I had to get here quickly."

"What was the first?" asked Jansen hastily.

"I want to see the return. Somehow, that will make the whole thing complete."

The Co-ordinator was silent for a few moments, then he said abruptly: "What about planets? Were there any—or didn't you have time for observation?"

"Two," said the Professor. "Max did a rough calculation and said there ought to be at least four. We managed to get the two by manual telescope."

"Close enough for any detail?"

"No. One looked vaguely like Mars, but with more oxygen. It might have been inhabitable, I suppose. It might even have a complex life-form of its own."

Jansen couldn't conceal his exasperation. "Why does he have to try and knock history on the head with a crowbar? Why in hell does he have to make decisions for the rest of us?"

"Who—Max? I told you his reasons."

"Not valid. Phoney."

Reigner flashed a faint smile. "But valid for him. When men can understand the motives of individualists like Max, they may possibly be fit to make the star voyage. But not, I think, before."

"You agree with him?"

"A little. Only I realize the futility of trying to put a brake on history."

Jansen began to pace up and down. "I suppose it's definite—about the star-ship crashing, I mean? If only we could collect that Zimova unit!"

Professor Reigner poured himself more coffee. "Even while we were working out the programming for the return journey, Max was already dying. He knew it, and I knew it. The whole effort had been too much—not transition itself, but the other things. The effort of forcing himself to kill eleven men, of demolishing the Star Base, and then the final strain of psycho-projection. But in any case, transition isn't the sort of thing to face alone."

"He didn't actually die while you were there?" persisted Jansen.

"That wouldn't have been possible," said the Professor. "He was controlling me. How could I have remained projected with a dead control?"

"So you couldn't witness his death?"

"No. By the time we were stepping up to the return transition,

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Max was too weak to retain me. I just literally faded."

"Then it would be theoretically possible for him to alter the crash programming," remarked the Co-ordinator hopefully.

"Not during transition—and I think that would finish him."

"But afterwards, if he survived—"

"*If* he survived," interrupted the Professor wearily, "it would be possible. But to what end? Why invalidate his own motives?"

Jansen shrugged. "The logic of the whole thing is beyond my reach, anyway. I'm just indulging in the wistful hope that there's a million to one chance."

Otto Reigner stood up and passed a hand over his eyes. For a few moments, he didn't seem to be able to focus properly. Then he pulled himself together.

"It's time we went back to Copernicus," he said. "I wouldn't want to be too late."

The inspection rocket was circling Copernicus at five thousand feet. Earth-light made the crater-bed look like a smooth green lake.

The Co-ordinator's expressionless gaze alternated between the crater and the sky. "This is the fourteenth circuit," he said. "No star-ship. If there's a time error, what do you think would be the probable magnitude?"

Professor Reigner ignored the question. "It will come," he said.

But Jansen didn't share his faith. After three hours of keyed-up expectancy, he was beginning to feel a little cheated.

With a sigh, the rocket pilot swung into his fifteenth circuit, wondering just how long this would have to go on.

And then it came. They all saw it in the same instant—an arrow-head of light curving smoothly out of the void. Visible at more than a hundred thousand feet, it took almost two minutes to drop down to the inspection rocket's altitude. The star-ship passed it at a distance of five or six miles, in a slow arc extending towards the northern segment of Copernicus.

"Good Lord, it's going to touch down!" shouted the Co-ordinator. "Follow it," he snapped to the pilot, "and drop as close as you can."

Even as the rocket changed course, the now hovering star-ship achieved a perfect touch-down stance.

At the same time, the Professor had become deathly pale, his eyes displaying a sudden vacancy. Then he spoke. The voice was familiar to Jansen. Not, however, as the voice of Otto Reigner.

"Man's future lies far out in space, but his past belongs to the terrestrial jungle. Someday, he will learn to reach for the stars without avarice. But only when he sees no jungle in the sky. That is why this first voyage must end in—"

The voice fell to a whisper, and was silent. Simultaneously, there was a flash of brilliant light.

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Jansen turned sharply to the observation frame and gazed out across the crater. At one thousand feet, the star-ship hung suspended. Then it appeared to unfold in great petals of flame. And for a moment, the crater was drenched with light. Then the white-hot debris dropped slowly through the lunar silence.

When there was nothing more to be seen, the Co-ordinator turned to Reigner angrily: "Well, I hope you're satisfied with—" He stopped. He was speaking to a dead man.

Or, as he told himself grimly, two dead men.

He looked at the shrunken figure, at the gray weary face, and thought of all that Otto Reigner had endured in the three days it had taken him to die.

Eventually the pilot spoke: "Still want me to go down?"

"No, it doesn't matter now."

The pilot, a youngster of twenty-one, was filled with curiosity. He put the rocket into a slow climb, and switched over to automatic. Then he went to have a look at the body.

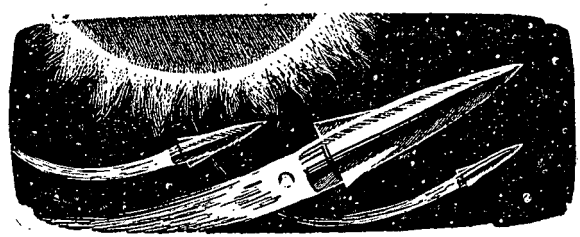
"Co-ordinator, what did he mean—that bit about a jungle in the sky?"

Co-ordinator Jansen gave a harsh laugh. "You don't know? Then I'll tell you, son. He meant that we're all just a bunch of clever apes; that civilization's only skin-deep; and that we're not fit to go shoving our hairy fingers into deep space. You can be sure he gave it some thought."

The pilot thought it over. Then he said: "Personally, I'd rather be a clever ape than a crazy human."

Jansen gazed through the observation frame at the hard, receding peaks of Copernicus. He gave another bitter laugh.

"Got any idea which is which?"



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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Two new anthologies and Andrew North's far-voyaging Solar Queen carry a spaceman's cargo of gold in the world of books.

ROBERT SHECKLEY has been described as "the most exciting new writer of science fantasy to appear in the last five years." While I am afraid this is a slight exaggeration, the quiet Mr. Sheckley has an interesting mind, considerable imagination, a sense of humor and an approach to issues that confront or could confront us, that make his emergence to importance as a writer one of the more encouraging things to happen to the field in recent years. This new group of stories, CITIZEN IN SPACE (Ballantine, 35 cents) is decidedly worth reading. Watch Sheckley's work in the next few years.

ANTHONY BOUCHER's new anthology, "The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction, Fifth Series" (Doubleday, $3.50) is a representative group of stories from a magazine that has from its beginning, to quote the publishers, been distinguished for its "uninhibited editorial policy." Writer-Editor-Critic-Anthologist Anthony Boucher, former president of the Mystery Writers of America, is that

In science fiction, as in every other branch of human endeavor, achievements of the first magnitude are often eclipsed by momentary bright Novas that quickly burn themselves out and dwindle to little cinder suns spinning through the void. But Hans Santessón is seldom deceived. (He would not be human if he were not occasionally deceived!) Brightness alone does not impress him nearly so much as the steadier glow of enduring excellence on a library shelf.

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rara avis in this field—a man who is first and foremost a pro (that word fan conventions shudder at) and who has made a lasting contribution to that section of American letters still called Science Fiction.

This new anthology has some interesting material. You will remember Avram Davidson's version of *The Golem,* Zenna Henderson's important and challenging *Pottage,* and particularly Walter Miller's story of Brother Francis of Utah, *A Canticle for Leibowitz.* There is also material by Isaac Asimov, Fredric Brown, Arthur C. Clarke (who will be in New York this Fall at the 14th World Science Fiction Convention), and still others. This is an anthology that really does represent much of "the best" in the field. Recommended.

More things—lots of more things—happen to Apprentice Cargo Master Dane Thorson in ANDREW NORTH's new PLAGUE SHIP (Gnome Press, $2.50). The Solar Queen, Galactic Free Trade Spacer, Terra registry, runs into problems on Sargol that do not end with their departure from that strange planet. From the morning when young Thorson first steps out on Sargol's ruby-tinted soil, carefully perfumed so that "no lingering taint of his off world origin must remain to disgust the sensitive nostrils of the Salariki," to the moment when he broadcasts to the System, the young man has a stirring time of it. An interesting idea—perhaps a little too rich in excitement—but certainly competent S-F for the teen-age reader.

Are you planning, incidentally, to attend the SEVENTH ANNUAL MIDWESTCON, to be held May 26th and 27th, 1956, at the North Plaza Motel, in Cincinnati? For more information, contact Don Ford, 129 Maple, Sharonville, Ohio.

I hope you did not miss Galaxy editor HORACE L. GOLD's interesting THE OLD DIE RICH (Crown, $3.00), a group of Science-Fiction stories with working notes and an analysis of each story. An hour—two hours—twenty-two hours after you have discovered the possibilities of *Love in the Dark,* understood, in *The Biography Project,* why the Biotime Camera couldn't be used any more, and shared Clocker Locke's feelings in *At the Post,* you will agree that here is able S-F, none the less so because you are not drowned in cliches and slightly worn out time-and-space jargon.

The world of Conan, that elemental swashbuckler who flourished in the Hyborian Age, storms at us again in ROBERT E. HOWARD's new TALES OF CONAN (Gnome Press, $3.00), a group of stories completed after the author's death by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP. "Totally unbelievable," to quote Robert

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Lowndes, Conan has for years been a decidedly uninhibited hero in the mythology of contemporary fantasy writing. Admittedly unrealistic, the tales still have—to quote L. Sprague de Camp—"such zest, speed, vitality and color" that you find yourself believing, with the author, in this world that Howard brought back out of the mists of a mythical pre-history. Conan of Cimmeria again slashes his way to victory in these new tales. For a few hours—or longer—many of you will be there with him, your scimitar also flashing, sinister sounds in the background warning of further dangers.

Arthur C. Clarke, British rocket pioneer and novelist, will be—as I've already reported—guest of honor at the 14th WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION which meets this Labor Day week-end, September 1, 2 and 3, 1956, at the Biltmore Hotel in New York. Dr. Isaac Asimov, Boston University biochemist and one of this column's favorite writers *and* people, was guest of honor at the 1955 convention in Cleveland. Send in your membership fee of $2.00 *now* to Art Saha, Secretary, 14th World S-F Convention, Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, N. Y.

MORRIS ERNST, who for years has "been carrying on a love affair with the United States" (to quote his publishers), turns to this field in his challenging UTOPIA 1976 (Rinehart, $3.50). An answer to the writings of "glandular pessimists," George Orwell among others, the distinguished attorney shares with us his "dream for our republic in 1976." Anticipating a new Age of Pericles, where we "will own time for living," and our increased productivity will increase the tools to enrich life, Ernst sees a world where new fission and solar energies may create a trillion-dollar gross national income, or $25,000 per year per family—a world where three great causes of waste, rust, moths and the common cold, will be eliminated—and a world (page Garry Davis here!) where no passports will be required to travel anywhere in the world. "The odds are overwhelming that new sources of energy will be developed by 1976 to the point where they are cheap enough to warrant, in commercial terms, such increased speeds that London to New York will take two hours, and short-distance rockets will carry mail from Cleveland to Chicago." (p. 182). Ernst anticipates a world where, by 1976, "expanding freedoms in the communication of ideas will help us make our lives richer in mind, freer in emotions" (p. 225), a world where we will change from an "audience society to a fully participating culture." Revealing—and interesting.

As John Campbell has pointed out, Science Fiction—as it was

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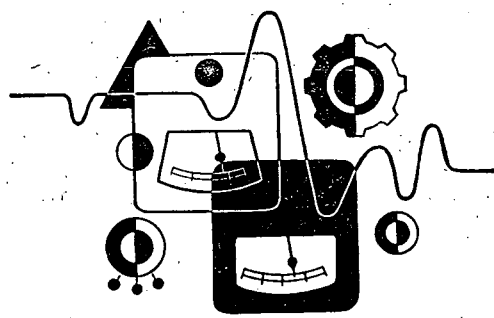
known only a decade ago—has for some time faced the necessity of exploring new planes and new fields. Science and Research have, in other words, caught up with Science Fiction! Alfred Bester explored the world of the ESP in his interesting "The Demolished Man" (Shasta) some years ago. MOREY BERNSTEIN, in THE SEARCH FOR BRIDEY MURPHY (Doubleday, $3.75), does more than trace the history of a number of experiments in hypnotism. Bernstein helps to document the case for ESP and Parapsychology as scientific realities and not merely escapees from your favorite S-F magazine. (Naturally FANTASTIC UNIVERSE!)

Those of you, pros and readers alike, who are interested in ESP, will find Bernstein's exploration of the subject of age-regression intensely interesting. Taking his subject (under hypnosis) back through time, further and further back, Bernstein becomes one of the few known researchers to concern himself deliberately with prenatal memory experiments—experiments which prove individual consciousness before birth and the scientific validity of Reincarnation.

As Morey Bernstein takes his subject into that world where Bridey Murphy waited until she was to return to Earth, he asks if there was "any such things as death, disease, or old age in that astral world?"

Bridey answers: "There was no death, there was just a . . . passing. You passed from that existence . . . you passed . . . to another existence. That's all, there was no death." (p. 147).

Morey Bernstein's "The Search for Bridey Murphy" is recommended to those of you who agree that there is need for research into those twilight shadows that we once knew.



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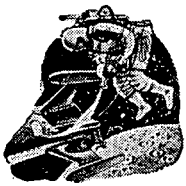

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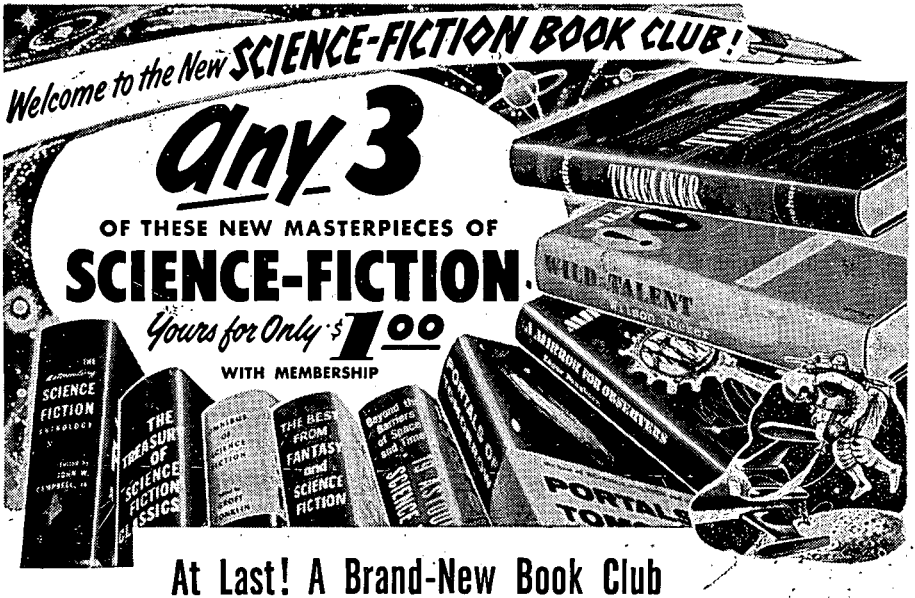

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